🟥 PlayStation 3 🟨 PlayStation Portable 🟩 PlayStation Network 🟦 PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

JUNE 08

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 7 (June 2008)

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GTA IV EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

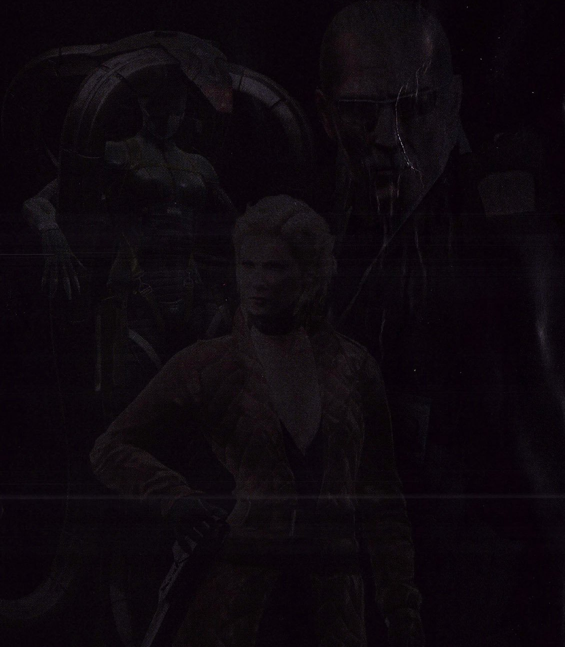
FIRST LOOK
Shaun "The Flying Tomato" White debuts an ambitious, insane snowboarding game

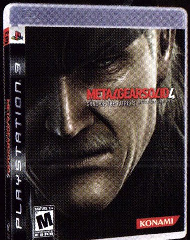
HANDS ON
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
Incredible new details

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

RED TEAM
M4 CUSTOM

In His Final Battle...




PLAYSTATION 3
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
KONAMI

Available
6.12.08

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Crude Humor
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB

A Hero Must Stand Alone

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

COMING EXCLUSIVELY ON THE PLAYSTATION®3
computer entertainment system

PLAYSTATION 3

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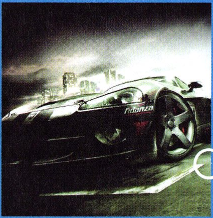

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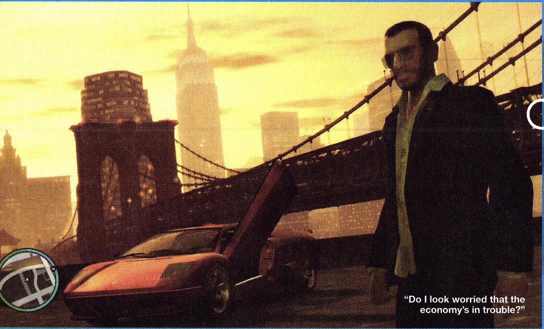

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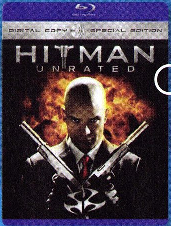
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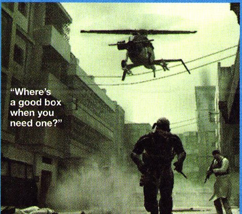
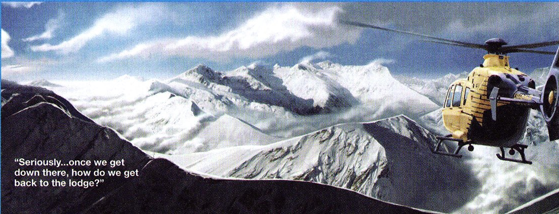
DIGITAL COPY SPECIAL EDITION
HITMAN
UNRATED



"Where's a good box when you need one?"



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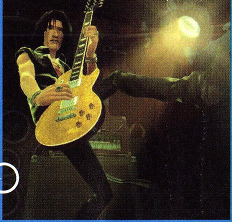

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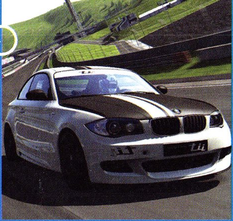

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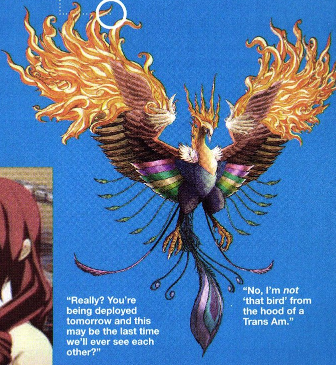


"Really? You're being deployed tomorrow and this may be the last time we'll ever see each other?"

"No, I'm *not* 'that bird' from the hood of a Trans Am."

Editor's Note

"Oh, yeah, apparently you can't be president with a whole brain."

I'm sure it's the ingrained Englishness, the culture-defining stiff upper lip, the Dunkirk spirit, the pride of the Bengal Lancers (three of you know what I'm talking about…) that gives us Brits that ability to remain unfazed in the face of adversity. And if beset by tragedy, you can bet your bottom dollar that the last lip to quiver will be that of an Englishman. It's a cultural trait I hold dear and proud.

So imagine my surprise when, on March 5, I was shockingly moved by some of the heartfelt tributes I was reading online in response to the passing the day before of E. Gary Gygax, the legendary creator of *Dungeons & Dragons.* Now, don't get me wrong, the upper lip remained stiff and dry. No need to retrieve the handkerchief from my pocket. No fake coughing fit or plaintive claim that an eyelash had imbedded itself in my eye. But still, a surprising reaction, sadness, and then, like so many of these online commentators, reflection.

Only once before in my EIC career have I devoted an Ed Note to an obituary. As I said that time (in 2001), I'm not one to collect heroes. Though I'm a massive soccer fan, I don't idolize any of the Sheffield United players (or managers) who I've cheered and jeered for over 30 years. No movie star or pop singer would ever be deserving of such an honorarium. I've met many of the alleged "stars" of the games industry, and I'm hard-pressed to consider any one of them—as awe-inspiringly talented as they may be—bona fide heroes.

Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (and the other four books that made up its infinitely improbable trilogy), was a hero. I'm still pissed that he succumbed to a massive heart attack just two weeks before I was going to meet the great man at E3. I mean, I could understand it if he already knew the tongue-tied drivel he'd have had to face, politely, in our planned meeting about his new game. But without notice, without consideration for this particular fan (and other editors similarly eager for the anticipated face time), he shuffled all too soon from this mortal coil. It hurt. Bad.

> "Without the game that Gary Gygax created, I probably wouldn't be in a position to write professionally about the great games inside."

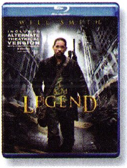
So, too, with Gary Gygax. My sadness in this case was even more surprising. It wasn't until I read regular game fans' reactions, describing more eloquently than I ever could Gygax's influence on their youth and more vitally their creativity and outward expression, that I recognized the gravity of this man's passive influence on my life. So I'm openly—and to over 300,000 readers—confessing that I'm a *D&D* geek, but this event (maybe for the first time ever) made me proud of that fact. Without Gygax and his game system I wouldn't have understood at such an early age what Dexterity meant. Or Charisma. (And as you fellow *D&D* dorks will recount, understanding the impact of a low score in that stat was all too painful!) Really, truly, honestly, without playing *D&D,* finding an outlet for creativity and also process and direction, I probably wouldn't have had the career I've enjoyed to this point.

If this sails wistfully over your head, do me a favor and read some of the heartfelt comments on sites like Quartertothree.com. If that doesn't move you, then I apologize for this column—turn the page and enjoy our most kick-ass issue ever. But without the game that Gary Gygax created, I probably wouldn't be in a position to write professionally about the great games inside. Thank you, thank you most sincerely, Mr. Gygax.

Rob

"Quote" contest

Enter to win a Blu-ray movie! Unless you're a first time reader (in which case, welcome) you should know that the headline at the top of this column is a quote from a movie. Identify the movie, send your answer (along with your name and shipping address) to **editor@psmonline.com** with Ed Note June in the subject line. I'll pick one lucky winner at random to receive a Blu-ray movie. I'll be sending one out to Peter Balazs of Arlington, WA, who identified the quote last issue from *Glengarry Glen Ross.*



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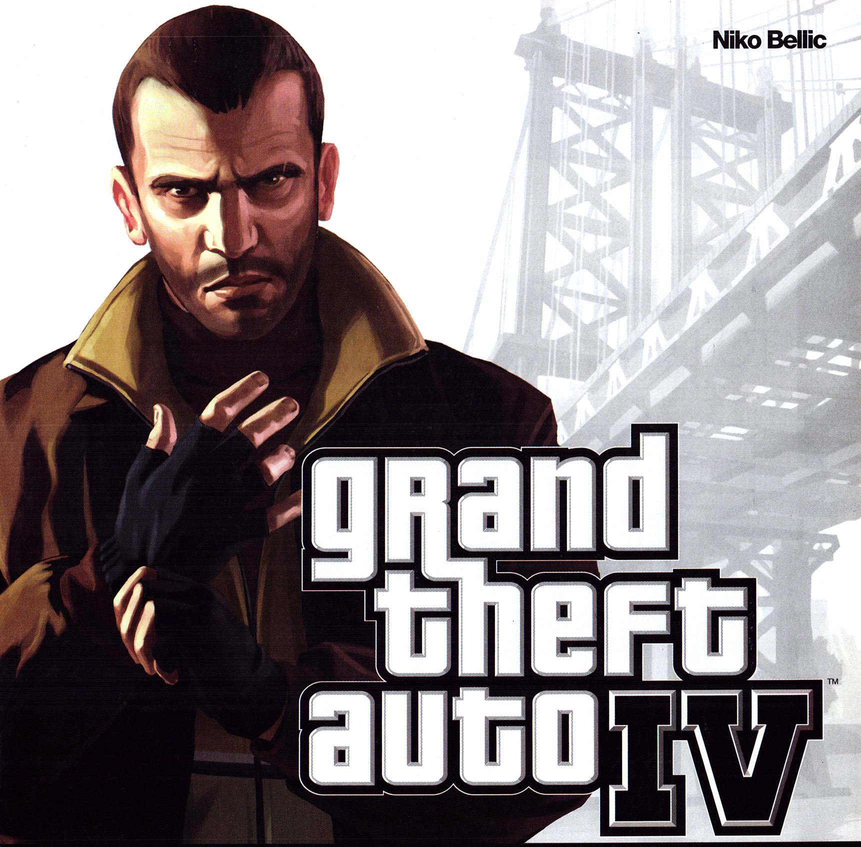

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- Strong Language
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PLAYSTATION 3

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» PSP POWER USER

7 MORE REASONS TO LOVE YOUR PSP

SONY
POWER
HOLD
HOME
VOL
SELECT
START

We all know the PSP plays games—and does a darn fine job of it too, thank you very much. And we all know the PSP's typical gadgety goodies, like the ability to transfer music, movies, and photos from your computer.

But what about streaming media? Internet radio? Playing PSone games? Indeed, the PSP is more than just a handheld-game-playing device with a few extras tossed in. Thanks to recently added or expanded features like Remote Play and the PlayStation Store, you can now access a heaping helping of content from the Internet or a PS3, including streaming games and media.

For the first installment of Power User, we picked out the seven most notable new PSP applications. (Note: All tests were conducted with the full screen brightness and volume at 50-percent.) In future installments of Power User, we'll take a look at Sony's version of Internet telephone service Skype, as well as other emerging uses for the platform, so stay tuned for additional ways to take full advantage of the PSP!

① **Internet Radio**
Listen to what you want, wherever you are

② **XMB Themes**
Some icons are born, some are made

③ **PS3 Downloads**
Why delay when you can start right away?

④ **PSone Discs**
Thousands of classics at your fingertips

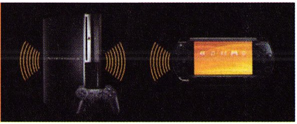
⑤ **Games & Demos (Downloads)**
Even your PC can join in on the fun

⑥ **Play PS3/PSN Games**
Sometimes a small screen is all you need

⑦ **Stream Media PS3/PC**
Share your cat photos with all your pals

Remote Control

You'll need to use Remote Play for several of these applications. To get started, you'll need both a PS3 and a PSP, which must be paired via the "Remote Play Settings" option under Settings in the PS3 XMB menu. Once paired, select "Remote Play" under the Network tab on the PS3, and then do the same on the PSP. You can access the PS3 via any Wi-Fi hotspot using your PSP, so if you're leaving the house, make sure your PS3 is turned on and ready for the remote connection to make use of this versatile feature.



① Streaming Internet radio

Why it's cool

With little effort, zero dollars, and a Wi-Fi connection, you can access dozens of free Internet radio stations available for your listening pleasure. Indie rock, J-pop, news, jazz, reggae, salsa—you name the genre or format, it's probably represented here. Not quite CD quality, but it's sharper than your traditional FM signal.

What it replaces

Preprogrammed radio stations might not be enough for you to ditch your iPod, but fans of satellite radio can trade in their portable players for this similar alternative.

How do I start listening?

Using firmware v3.80 or higher, hit the "About Internet Radio" option under the Network tab on the XMB and follow the "Adding the player to the Memory Stick Duo" link to nab a free player.

Battery impact: Average

One hour of Internet radio drained about 15-percent of the complete battery charge, with or without headphones. We allowed the screen to shut off after a few minutes of inactivity, as we suspect many listeners would, but those consistently fumbling with the buttons or listening at a higher volume level could see more of a hit to the battery life.

② Customizable XMB themes

Why it's cool

Tired of the traditional XMB icons? Freshen it up! Several free downloadable themes are available from the PC-based PlayStation Store (with other fan-made ones scattered around the 'net). Or, channel your virtual Martha Stewart with the official PSP Theme Creator and substitute homemade icons for the stock ones.

What it replaces

Well, aside from the basic XMB theme you've been staring at for upward of three years, it might replace any desire to customize the outside of the PSP with gross "skins" and gaudy trinkets. Put down the Bedazzler!

I'm ready to create!

Grab the PC tool from the SCEJ website (www.jp.playstation.com/psp/dl/tool/data/Custom_Theme.zip)—don't worry, it's in English. Hit Google for tutorials if you're thin on image manipulation know-how, then transfer the created theme to your Memory Stick Duo like you would any other file.

Battery impact: Minimal

All of the heavy lifting is done on your PC, and it shouldn't take more than a minute to place the new theme in the system settings once it's on your Memory Stick.

③ Start PS3 downloads

Why it's cool

Let's say you just heard about a hot new PS3 demo/video online, but you're stuck in line at the DMV. What to do? Start the download from your PSP using Remote Play, and when you get home, the file will be sitting on your PS3 hard drive (or at least on its way to completion).

What it replaces

Waiting. Why let the "real world" delay your fun? Now you can be ready to geek out on the goods the second you get home!

Sign me up!

Simply hit up Remote Play on your PSP, then scroll over to the "PlayStation Store" option under the PlayStation Network XMB tab. Peruse the in-store items just like you would on the PS3, and start downloading straight to your home console.

Battery impact: Minimal

Unless you're looking in every nook and cranny of the PlayStation Store, it won't take more than a couple of minutes to locate a file and start the remote download.

④ Play PSone Discs (via PS3)

Why it's cool

In December, Sony quietly unleashed a firmware update allowing the use of Remote Play to run PSone discs on a PSP via any backward-compatible-enabled PS3. Think of all the classics you can dig out of the attic (or purchase on eBay)!

What it replaces

Your dusty old PSone console, the downloadable PSP/PS3 versions of the same games (available from the PlayStation Store), and any PSone remakes that publishers might release on PSP.

I've got a ton of PSone games!

Once you're in Remote Play, simply load the PSone disc into your PS3 and select the game from the XMB menu (via the PSP screen).

Battery impact: Significant

While playing *Final Fantasy VII*, we zapped 31-percent of the battery life during one full hour, but just 21-percent during another solid hour. Playing *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* similarly ate up 30-percent of the battery charge in an hour, so we'd be surprised if you could log much more than four hours of play on a full charge. Gameplay lag may be an even bigger issue, though, especially with faster-paced games (*Wipeout 3* was nearly unplayable).

⑤ Download games and demos

Why it's cool

Initially, you needed a PS3 to download and transfer PSP games that weren't on a UMD. With the holiday launch of the PC-based PlayStation Store, it's now easier than ever to access cheap original games and PSone favorites, plus free playable demos.

What it replaces

Fresh, original experiences might eliminate the need to hit the bargain bins for second-rate games when seeking something cheap to play; when downloadable demos are the new rental, why drop eight dollars to try a game?

Sign me up!

On the PS3, you can simply download a file from the PlayStation Store, install it to the hard drive, and then transfer it to the PSP. Those armed with a computer can hit store.playstation.com and follow the instructions to purchase and/or download files and get them onto the Memory Stick Duo.

Battery impact: Minimal

An hour spent playing *Beats* (an original rhythm title), a demo of *Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow*, and PSone classic *Jumping Flash* drained just 15-percent of the full battery charge.

⑥ Play PS3/PSN games

Why it's cool

While not as broad a program as we'd like, a handful of PS3 and PSN titles can be played on the PSP via Remote Play. Games like *Lair*, *PixelJunk Monsters*, and *High Stakes on the Vegas Strip: Poker Edition* currently support PSP play, with future PSN remake *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* also slated to utilize the feature.

What it replaces

Your PS3! Okay, that's clearly not true since you need a PS3 to use the feature—but no longer shall you be shackled to the couch to play select games. Plus, *Lair* ditches the much-maligned motion controls for the PSP version. That's a plus.

I'm ready to downsize!

For applicable Blu-ray titles, simply have the disc in your PS3 and enter Remote Play; with PSN releases, download the game from the PlayStation Store and access it from your PSP via Remote Play.

Battery impact: Significant

An hour of office-favorite *PixelJunk Monsters* zapped just over 25-percent of our battery charge, though lag was barely noticeable and the 2D visuals looked pretty solid on the small screen.

⑦ Stream media from PS3/PC

Why it's cool

Rather than load up your Memory Stick Duo with audio, video, and pictures, you can fill the PS3 hard drive with the goods and stream them wirelessly via Remote Play. And since a PC can link up with the PS3 as a media server, you can access all of those files as well!

What it replaces

No longer will you need an iPod or similar media player to access a massive media collection on the go. Additionally, you won't have to splurge for (or bother managing space on) a multi-gigabyte Memory Stick Duo.

I can listen to Celine Dion anywhere?

Yep. Either download files from the PlayStation Store or transfer them to the PS3 hard drive via USB memory sticks (or other storage types), then access Remote Play via the PSP and play the files from the XMB.

Battery impact: Variable

Looking at pictures won't drain a whole lot of power (unless you're viewing an epic slideshow), but listening to music sucked up 20-percent of the charge for an hour, while video playback ate up nearly 30-percent of the battery life.

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MARVEL

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“We’ll have enough time to do the games the way they were meant to be.”

Illustration by Ken Bousquet

OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW

JOHN SMEDLEY

The president of Sony Online Entertainment prepares to be assimilated into the PlayStation collective.

Once upon a time, a small development studio had a big dream that they pursued with the ebullience of early dotcom entrepreneurs. Their concept? Take fantasy role-playing games—still popular on the PC and fondly recalled from bygone tabletop sessions with *Dungeons & Dragons*—and bring it to the online-connected PC. Their game? *EverQuest*. It became a spectacular phenomenon, earning its principles oodles of cash (or so we think—we have no idea how the financials really work). That company, Verant, ultimately became Sony Online Entertainment, and on March 13, Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. absorbed the studio into its first-party collective.

As a bastion of online gaming (and already committed as a PS3 developer with *Dark Kingdoms* under its belt), SOE represents an intriguing addition to the PlayStation's internal studio network. We quizzed SOE's president about how this move will benefit his studio, the PS3, and gamers around the world.

PTOM: So what does the announcement about SOE formally being managed under SCEI actually mean?

JS: The biggest thing is tying us directly back into a games company, which is a huge positive. SCEI knows games, so it's like going home; it's like returning to a company that just does games.

Does this change affect the development or release plans for any of the existing titles in the works?

It does in a couple of ways. First, it gives us access to a lot of PlayStation 3 expertise, and possible PSP expertise. Also, despite the fact that we have good coders in our company, it gives us great access to the first-party technology sharing.

Any other benefits?

It provides us the potential for working with [SCEA's] marketing group; we're now attached to the powerful brand of PlayStation, and that gives us access to different parts of the organization that we didn't have before.

Does this move affect SOE's PC game development work?

Not at all. Other than potentially doing games that we didn't have before, and the potential for expanding our brands onto PC, nothing changes.

Does that mean that *Tanarus* [an early SOE online tank combat game] could reappear as PlayStation Network content?

One of the opportunities that we really think this move brings us is delivering more games to the PlayStation Network. It's a very meaningful market. If it weren't for the name, I'd have brought *Tanarus* online already. But it's not a good name.

Does this move signal the expansion of game production within SOE?

We're continuing production as is right now, and gradually, over time, will expand it. Behind the scenes, expect the *EverQuest* franchise to continue...that's not ending.

What about release dates? How will those be impacted?

One nice thing about being a part of a real game company is the focus on letting the games be finished and polished. So we have a renewed emphasis on that, which bought us some time that we need. We want to make sure that gamers won't see rushed releases from us; this move means we'll have enough time to do the games the way they were meant to be.

Now that you're part of SCEI, will we see more offline games?

No. In fact it allows us to keep our focus as an online company. We were in danger of diluting that focus, but we're an online gaming company, and we want to keep it that way. All we play here in the office is online games.

From a technical standpoint, how will the PS3 affect your development?

We're focused on integrating voice control, so we're designing *DC Online* [the MMO game based in the DC Comics universe] so you don't need a keyboard, and you primarily rely on voice. One lesson we learned from *EverQuest Online Adventures*—though it was a great PS2 game—was that you had to have a keyboard, and that was a severely limiting factor. And in today's gaming environment, people are expecting to have voice communication.

How has Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* impacted the development and design decisions of your upcoming massively multiplayer online games?

What Blizzard did better than anyone—us included—was polish. Arguably you could take *EverQuest*, and take the time iterating and iterating, and you'd have *WoW*. What we're doing with our next titles is making sure we polish and polish them. We have enough invested in the games, and now we have the backing to invest enough to make it possible for us to do that.

John Smedley 411

AGE:
39
EDUCATION:
High school graduate, some college. "I was better at programming games than I was at attending class."
FIRST ONLINE GAME DEVELOPED:
Tanarus, a tank warfare simulator for Windows 95 at a development cost of $1,070,949 in 1997.
NUMBER OF SOE EMPLOYEES AT THE START OF YOUR TENURE:
50
NUMBER OF SOE EMPLOYEES WORLDWIDE TODAY:
700
FAVORITE BOOK:
Game of Thrones by George R. R. Martin
FAVORITE VACATION SPOT:
Cozumel, Mexico

How will you pay for SOE's games, such as *The Agency*, *FreeRealms*, and *DC Online*?

Every option is on the table. *FreeRealms* is a straight digital delivery and microtransaction format, with an optional velvet subscriber rope. Free release and updated delivery is the future, and I'm hoping it goes that way for *The Agency* and *DC Online*.

Will PC and PS3 development allow players to compete across both platforms?

No, with a game like *The Agency*, with one account you can log in and play from your PC, and then if you move to the couch and want to use your PS3, you can log on as the same character and play from there. You can't, however, play a PC-controlled character against one on PlayStation 3. That's not because of security, it's just due to skill. I wouldn't want to be on my PS3 and face someone on the PC—with their control system; they'd just shred me.

"Expect the *EverQuest* franchise to continue...that's not ending."

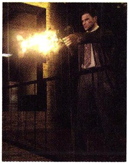
PlayStation Digest

Top Stories, Industry Bits, and Oddities

Romance of the Two Money-doms

When the multi-billion dollar movie industry came face to face with the younger, fresher—yet also multi-billion dollar—videogame industry, it couldn't help but scrub its face and turn on the charm. Two such similar creatures ought to belong together, the film industry reasoned. After a glitzy whirlwind romance full of profit maximization discussions and copyright negotiations, the two found themselves with a myriad of hybrid offspring, some definitely more attractive than others. But the two aren't finished with each other yet, as proven by the sprinkling of videogame-related films poised to be released in the coming years. Here are five that we're most excited about.

Franchise: *Metal Gear Solid*
People Involved: Mike De Luca (Producer)
Status: Searching for a writer. David Hayter, the voice of Snake, is not only a voice actor but also a screenwriter. Though he pitched a treatment for the movie, Konami/Sony passed on it. As of this moment, Hayter's involvement in the film will be minimal.
Why We Care: Come on! *Metal Gear Solid* is practically a movie already! If the same care and attention given to the cut scenes are poured into a film, it could be awesome. If done right, of course.

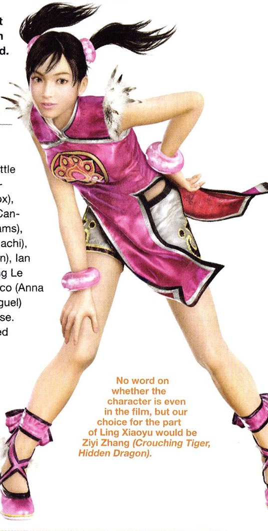


Franchise: *Max Payne*
People Involved: John Moore (Director), Mark Wahlberg (Max Payne), Mila Kunis (Mona Sax), Beau Bridges (B.B. Hensley), Beau Thorne (Writer)
Status: In production, with a rumored release date of October 17, 2008.
Why We Care: So far, the cast looks solid—better than many game movie casts. Hopefully, they can pull off the gritty, over-the-top feel so beloved in *Max Payne*.

Franchise: *Prince of Persia*
People Involved: Jerry Bruckheimer (Producer), Mike Newell (Director), Gemma Arterton (Princess Farah), Jordan Mechner (Initial Script Writer)
Status: Unknown.
Why We Care: Mechner, the *Prince of Persia* creator, says, "Rather than do a straight beat-for-beat adaptation of the new videogame, we're taking some cool elements from the game and using them to craft a new story—much like *Pirates* did with the theme park ride." Hm, we liked *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Maybe we'll like the *Prince of Persia* movie, too?

Franchise: Onimusha
People Involved: Christophe Gans (Director), Takeshi Kaneshiro (Samanosuke)
Status: Unknown—possible late 2009 release.
Why We Care: Demons, samurais, long swords...what's not to love? But the real reason we care is because fan favorite (and heartthrob) Takeshi Kaneshiro is rumored to be in it. We can only hope Jean Reno joins the project, too.

Franchise: *Tekken*
People Involved: Dwight Little (Director), John Foo (Jin Kazama), Luke Goss (Steve Fox), Gary Daniels (Bryan Fury), Candice Hillenbrand (Nina Williams), Gary-Hiroyuki Tagawa (Heihachi), Darrin Dewitt Henson (Raven), Ian Anthony Dale (Kazuya), Cung Le (Marshall Law), Marion Zapico (Anna Williams), Roger Huerta (Miguel)
Status: Possible 2009 release.
Why We Care: Movies based on fighting games are more of a guilty pleasure than a representative of quality art, but we don't mind. If it has solid segments of eye-popping martial arts action, we'll let the cheesiness slide.



No word on whether the character is even in the film, but our choice for the part of Ling Xiaoyu would be Ziyi Zhang *(Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon).*

Games to Movies

Games based on movies generally suck. They're low quality and exist only to suck cash out of the wallets of hapless, game-ignorant film lovers. That's the prevalent attitude among the more hardcore gamers, at least. But Brash Entertainment hopes to change that stigma by working with top-notch developers to create movie-licensed games. The company has signed deals with Factor 5 (*Lair*) and Game Republic (*Folklore*) for future movie-based games so far. Only time will tell if Brash's "brash" goals will be a success.

GIRL Power

The letters stand both for Gamers In Real Life and for Sony's commitment to "raise awareness of the serious female gaming audience...to positively promote women throughout all facets of games, game production, and into game management." To celebrate its new program, Sony is awarding a $10,000 scholarship toward tuition at one of The Art Institute schools as well as an internship at one of the SOE studios. Visit www.station.sony.com/girl/ for more details.

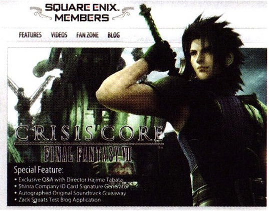
FRONTMAN
PS3

Two Games, One Guitar

If you're in the market for a guitar that's compatible with both *Guitar Hero III* and *Rock Band*, Nyko's Front Man Wireless Guitar might be for you. While it doesn't look as snazzy as either of the first-party peripherals, at $59.99, it's a good alternative to picking up two separate controllers. A foot pedal lets you switch between the two games wirelessly, and the sensors and whammy bars needed to play the games are intact.

Members Only

Both Square Enix and Rockstar recently released "members only clubs" where you can sign up (free) to participate in exclusive content. Square Enix's focus seems to be on interviews, fun little gimmicks (such as a Shinra Company ID Card Signature Generator), and contests. Rockstar's focus, on the other hand, is on multiplayer leaderboards, a Hall of Fame, and other *GTA IV* interactivity. If you want to be "in," go to **www.rockstargames.com/socialclub/** and **http://member.square-enix.com/na/** to join.



SQUARE ENIX. MEMBERS

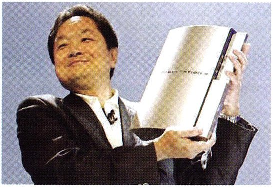
FEATURES VIDEOS FAN ZONE BLOG

CRISIS CORE
FINAL FANTASY VII

Special Feature:
- Exclusive Q&A with Director Hajime Tabata
- Shinra Company ID Card Signature Generator
- Autographed Original Soundtrack Giveaway
- Zack Squats Test Blog Application

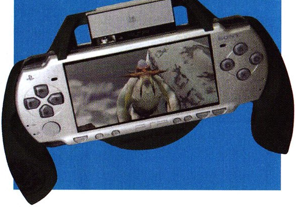
Yet Another Kutaragi Award

The acclaimed "Father of the PlayStation" Ken Kutaragi earns yet more recognition, this time from the Consumer Electronics Association. (He received accolades from the Entertainment Software Association and Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences in late 2007.) Come October, he and 11 others will be joining other famed individuals (such as Thomas Edison and Steve Wozniak) in the CE Hall of Fame. The CEA is recognizing Kutaragi for his contributions to the gaming industry and the PlayStation brand. Go, Kutaragi!



Anorexic PSP?
Fatten it up with a Monster Hunter Grip

"How can we make the PSP *better*?" That's a question MSY probably did *not* ask themselves when they created this odd Monster Hunter Grip peripheral. It's compatible with the PSP-2000—in other words, the PSP *Slim*—so of course PSP owners' first thought would be to buy a contraption that makes their sleek little system bulkier...yes, we're puzzled. But Capcom licensed it, so we guess someone somewhere probably has a need for it... Maybe Japanese consumers who've spent a few too many hours hunting monsters (hand cramps and all that). At the moment, the device isn't available in U.S. Then again, neither is the latest *Monster Hunter*. Yet.



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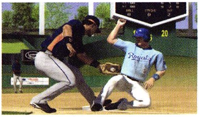
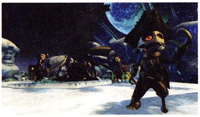
Out with the New, In with the Old?

The Sixaxis has had its time in the PlayStation sun, but now that the DualShock 3 is on store shelves, it's time for the sans-rumble controller to gracefully retire. Yes, the Sixaxis is being discontinued, but that's almost irrelevant, because for only five bucks more ($54.99) you can pick up a DS3, which includes both rumble and motion sensor control.

Here's the full list of titles with rumble enabled:



- Blast Factor*
- Burnout Paradise
- Condemned 2: Bloodshot
- Devil May Cry 4
- Dragon Ball Z Burst Limit
- Dynasty Warriors 6
- Folklore*
- Formula One Championship Edition*
- Go! Sports Ski*
- Gran Turismo 5 Prologue
- Heavenly Sword*
- High Velocity Bowling
- Lost: Via Domus
- Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
- MLB 08: The Show
- MotorStorm*
- PAIN
- PixelJunk Monsters
- Piyotama
- PSOne Emulation
- Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction
- Resistance: Fall of Man
- Snakeball
- Super Stardust HD*
- Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas 2
- Toy Home
- Turok
- Uncharted: Drake's Fortune
- Warhawk*



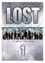
* require patches via PSN

Japan's Monster Hunter Love Affair

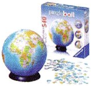
Statistics and numbers don't always present a complete picture, but we found this simply amazing. During the last week of March, the PlayStation Portable outsold the Nintendo DS, Nintendo Wii, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 2, and Xbox 360 in Japan. In fact, it was a few figures shy of outselling the rest of the systems *combined*, thanks to the release of *Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G*. We wonder why the *Monster Hunter* franchise never achieved the same status here in the U.S.

TOP10LIST

What we're playing, watching, reading, and absorbing in the world of entertainment this month.

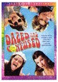


Lost: Season 1 | TV | $1.99/episode
Late to the party again, Rob's finally watching the first season of *Lost* on his iPod while schlepping around the globe to go play *MGS4*, *GTA4*, and others. *Note to Rob: Avoid flights that take you over mysterious, secluded islands.*



Ravensburger Puzzleballs | Toy | $25-$40
After a tough day at the office playing videogames, Gary likes to unwind with a…puzzle?! Well, not just any puzzle, but a Ravensburger puzzleball—a high-quality, collectible diversion that has consumed Gary's spare time, as well as his living-room floor with scattered pieces all around! Who says gamers have no life?!

DualShock 3 | PS3 controller | $54.99
By the time you read this, you'll be able to purchase your own DualShock 3 controller, but we've been enjoying the rumbling goodness for weeks thanks to one of Rob's out-of-the-office-again jaunts to Japan. We recommend playing *GT5 Prologue* to reintroduce yourself to an old sensory-feedback friend.



Dazed and Confused | DVD | $10
A stellar cast, solid soundtrack, and subtly comedic plot has helped this 1993 high school film achieve cult status, but Teresa never had to chance to see the film until now. She loves how the movie captures the essence of the 70s, but maybe that's just because she never experienced the era for herself (unlike, as Teresa puts it, other more "seasoned" members of the staff).

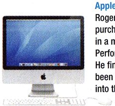
White Imported PSP Slim | Game System | $230
Teresa just can't get enough of her PSP Slim these days...especially since she recently got a beautiful Ceramic White one from Japan. She just wishes Sony would release an official white PSP pouch and strap so she can be the most fashionable gamer in the office.

Chocolate Mochi Ice Cream balls | Food | $6.00/box
Ken's first thought was how can you possibly ruin chocolate ice cream? Outraged, but secretly intrigued, he marveled at the two-inch diameter balls wrapped "in some sort of skin and dusted with powder." (That would be the mochi, Ken.) Ken finally succumbed and now works for mochi ice cream balls in lieu of a salary.

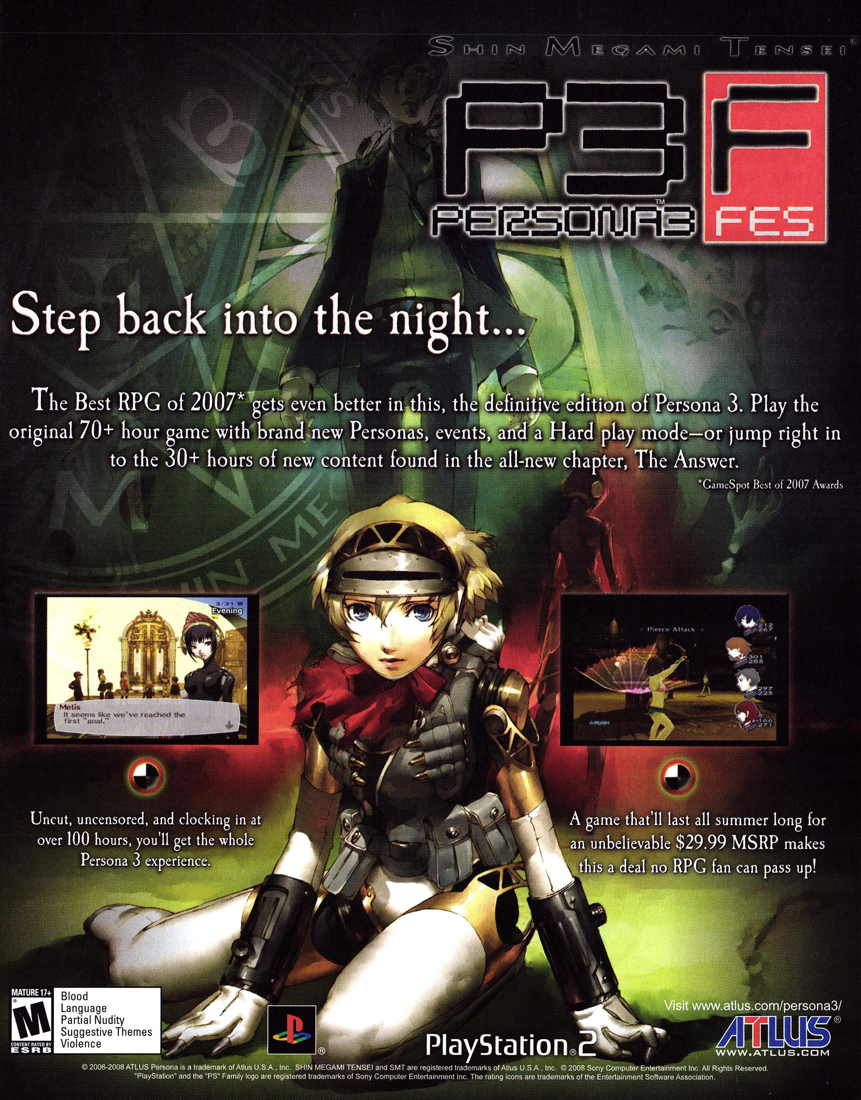
Glucosamine Chondroitin with MSM | Health | $15
Creaky knees? Ankles pop and snap? According to Ken, this stuff is like a lube job for your joints that turns your broken down beater of a body into something shiny and fast. Kids: Don't go guzzling this stuff just because some geezers…er, seasoned staffers at PTOM said so. Always consult with your doctor, parents, and legal guardians before imbibing anything besides…water, basically.

MLB 08: The Show | PS3 Game | $59.99
Rob, Ken, and publisher Dan Morris are making *MLB 08: The Show* a season-long obsession. Rob insists on playing as the woefully inept Giants, meaning that to make it a fair game everyone else has to play an equally sucky team (which is difficult considering the state of the '08 Giants). The seven-game rivalry format is perfect for setting up World Series-like situations.

Battlestar Galactica | TV | However much Sci-Fi Channel costs
It's back! *BSG* isn't just the best sci-fi show on TV; it's the best show on TV *period.* The added bonus is that lusting after Six seems less sad and pathetic than harboring a crush for *Star Trek: Voyager's* Seven of Nine (okay, maybe not.) Season four promises to be the best yet with Galactica on the verge of reaching Earth, but it'll be a bittersweet journey as it's also the show's final season.



Apple 24" iMac | Computer | A lot of pretty pennies
Roger boycotted Apple computers for nearly 15 years after purchasing a Macintosh Centris 610 that was rendered obsolete in a matter of weeks by the introduction of the Power PC-based Performa 6100—with nearly three years of payments remaining! He finally forgave Apple and recently purchased a 24" iMac. It's been almost two months since the purchase and it hasn't turned into the proverbial paperweight...yet, so he's feeling pretty good.



Metis
It seems like we've reached the first "goal."

Step back into the night...

The Best RPG of 2007* gets even better in this, the definitive edition of Persona 3. Play the original 70+ hour game with brand new Personas, events, and a Hard play mode—or jump right in to the 30+ hours of new content found in the all-new chapter, The Answer.

*GameSpot Best of 2007 Awards

Uncut, uncensored, and clocking in at over 100 hours, you'll get the whole Persona 3 experience.

A game that'll last all summer long for an unbelievable $29.99 MSRP makes this a deal no RPG fan can pass up!

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Language
Partial Nudity
Suggestive Themes
Violence

PlayStation®2

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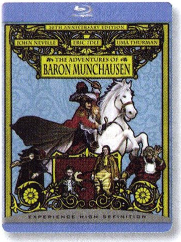
Blu-ray Central

What's new to Blu-ray this month

An assortment of Blu-ray titles has hit the streets lately, from videogame adaptations to a bevy of Will Smith offerings, and even some for the kiddies. More importantly, a true classic from Terry Gilliam leads the way.

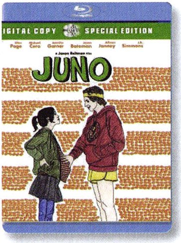

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
JOHN NEVILLE
ERIC IDLE
UMA THURMAN
THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN
EXPERIENCE HIGH DEFINITION

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen

PRICE: $28.95 **RATED:** PG

Terry Gilliam's fantastical and amazing ode to old age is, like most of his movies, not for everyone. It is, quite literally, a movie of imagination over rationality in the burgeoning, and ironically named, "age of reason." The whole experience is a spectacle of amazingly bizarre creativity. The transfer is slightly noisy, but the Baron looks as good now as he did in the 80s and the commentary between Gilliam and writer/actor, Charles McKeown, is hilarious. The included documentaries are also fascinating for fans of this woefully underappreciated classic.

MOVIES ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★★

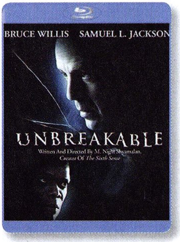


Juno

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** PG-13

It seems hard to believe that one of the most sincere, funny, and intelligent comedies of the past year is about teenage pregnancy. Yet, *Juno* is all those things—full of fantastic one-liners, realistic characters, and great acting, it's certainly the smartest "teen" comedy you'll come across. Fox has done the movie justice with a fine Blu-ray edition that features a sharp, detailed picture and a plethora of great extras.

MOVIES ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★½

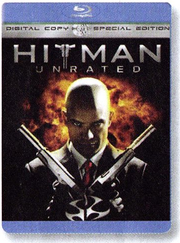

BRUCE WILLIS
SAMUEL L. JACKSON
UNBREAKABLE
Written And Directed By M. Night Shyamalan, Creator Of The Sixth Sense

Unbreakable

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** PG-13

Before M. Night Shyamalan became so mired down in his own self-love and started making complete crap, he had two genuinely good movies. *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable* share several key similarities—they're slow, brooding, dark, and have a clever twist ending. *Unbreakable,* however, earns a special place in the hearts of comic book and superhero aficionado, of which M. Night clearly is one. Likely too slow for many, if you can handle the pacing, this is a remarkably adept and dramatic modern-day, real-life what-if scenario about a guy who discovers he's indestructible. The picture quality is generally quite good, though a bit muddy in spots, and the audio is especially good. Unfortunately, the extras are just ripped from the DVD version.

MOVIES ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★



Hitman

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** R/UNRATED

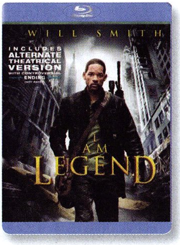
An enjoyably entertaining and goofy action flick, *Hitman* is surprisingly true to the source material. Essentially a more cartoonish version of Jason Bourne, Agent 47 proves to be a maestro at assassination and a complete tool with the ladies. Timothy Olyphant seems an odd choice for the lead, but pulls it off well, and the movie is full of remarkably good action scenes. The unrated version doesn't add much beyond some extra violence, and the hi-def extras and a terrific HD transfer round out one for fans of the game series.

MOVIES ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

Blu-ray 2.0

Proving once again that the PS3 is the safest and most future-proof of all Blu-ray players, Sony has upgraded its uber-system with even more HD goodness. Called the BD Profile 2.0, this added functionality to Blu-ray players is the final tier of the format's initial evolution plan. The new 2.0 standard is uniquely suited to the PS3's built-in Internet access and hard drive, as the latest set of features requires both. Current and upcoming titles will now enable viewers to download themed content from their living rooms, including ringtones that can be uploaded straight to your cell phone, subtitles, bonus scenes, trailers, and other specialized content. Multiplayer games have already been offered on some titles, like War, though it's hard to imagine too many PS3 owners spending much time on these generally simplistic, Java-type games.

Combined with the 1.1 profile upgrade that enabled picture-in-picture support, this new level of interactivity should enable determined movie publishers to create truly immersive, behind the scenes experiences for your favorite movies. In conjunction with the update, Sony Pictures has released two Profile 2.0 titles. *Walk Hard: the Dewey Cox Story* and *The 6th Day* will both support exclusive downloadable content that should give users a taste of what to expect as more studios warm up to the potential of Blu-ray technology.

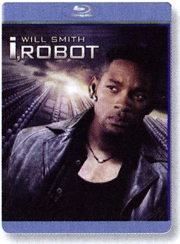

WILL SMITH
INCLUDES ALTERNATE THEATRICAL VERSION WITH CONTROVERSIAL ENDING
I AM LEGEND

I Am Legend

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** PG-13/UNRATED

Loosely based on Richard Matheson's classic novel (remade twice so far in movie format as *The Last Man on Earth* and *The Omega Man),* the latest version of *I Am Legend* takes a decidedly different tone by placing Smith as a research scientist in a now-abandoned Big Apple trying to hold onto his sanity long enough to find a cure for a vampiric plague. The movie shifts in fits and starts, but provides plenty of thrills and interesting plot elements, and Will Smith's portrayal of a man whose mental state is tenuous at best is exceptional. The Blu-ray transfer is stunning, easily marking the experience as one of the best looking and sounding HD movies currently available. The generous helping of extras is predominantly filmed in HD, and the alternate ending is surprisingly different from the also-included theatrical version's.

MOVIES ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★★



I, Robot

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** PG-13

To say *I, Robot* is based on the classic works of Isaac Asimov is something like saying that *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* was inspired by something Alan Moore once wrote. The movie is all about the three laws, sure, and the lead character shares a name with one of Asimov's protagonists. Beyond that, the movie has more in common with *Aliens.* To that end, the Blu-ray transfer looks spectacular—easily one Fox Home Video's best—and as stupid as the plot often is, *I, Robot* succeeds by being great looking and fun. The extras are basically straight from the DVD unfortunately.

MOVIES ★★★
EXTRAS ★★½

KIDS KORNER

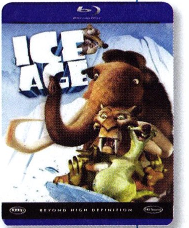
This month yields a trio of flicks aimed at the youngsters. Your mileage may vary.

Ice Age

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** PG

It took long enough, but one of the most endearing and engaging of the non-Pixar CG movies finally hits Blu-ray. Far better than the thrown-together sequel, *Ice Age* works on just the right levels for kids and adults. The transfer is solid, though not noise free, but overall, this is a great disc.

MOVIES ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

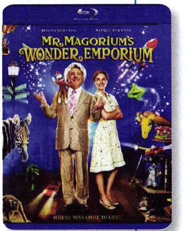


Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium

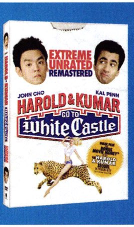
PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** G

Not just a lame *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* rip-off, this *Emporium* is better than you'd think. Each scene is full of glowing details that benefit from the HD transfer, and Dustin Hoffman looks positively ecstatic to be hanging out with Natalie Portman (and who wouldn't be?). It's a fun kids' movie with some surprisingly dark twists. Unfortunately (and perhaps because Fox figured kids won't care), there are no extras at all and the picture is overly noisy.

MOVIES ★★★
EXTRAS ★



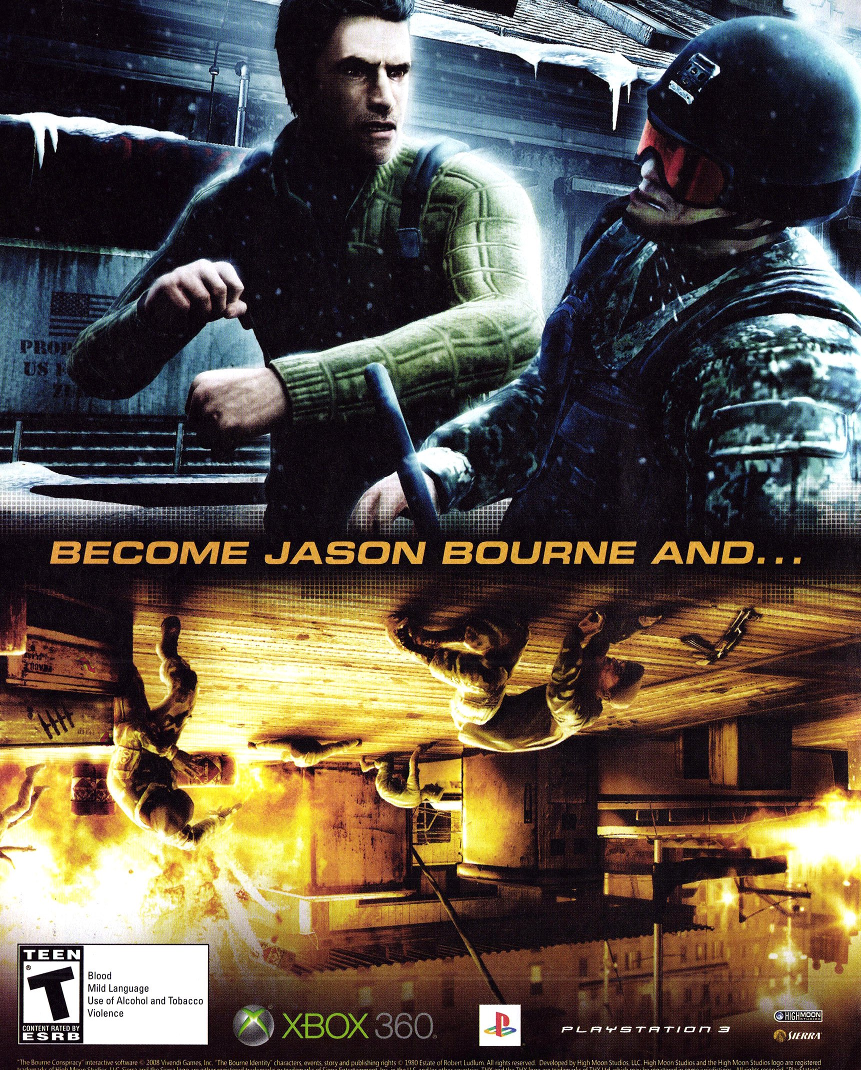
Win Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle!



TO CELEBRATE THE RELEASE OF THE CULT classic comedy, *Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle,* New Line has ponied up FIVE copies of The New Extreme Unrated version of the movie for PTOM readers to win. (While it's pretty damn funny beginning to end, Neil Patrick Harris' cameo is possibly the star of the show. Oh, how that Doogie Howser, M.D. has growed all up). What hoops do we demand you jump through to win one of the movies? Simply send your name and mailing address to contest@psmonline.com with Harold & Kumar in the subject line, and we'll select five lucky winners at random. Good luck.

Contest Rules

No purchase is necessary to win and as a contestant you have not yet won. Entries must be received no later than June 15, 2008. The winners will be chosen on or about June 16, and will be notified by email or regular mail. The odds of winning depend upon the number of entries received. The sponsor of the contest is Future US, Inc. and New Line Cinema. Future US and New Line Cinema cannot be responsible for lost, late, misdirected, or incomplete entries. The prizes are nontransferable and no substitutions will be allowed. Winners will be determined by a single random drawing of all valid entries and the decision of Future US shall be final. You may obtain the name of the winner by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Future US, Attn: Harold & Kumar DVD, 4000 Shoreline Ct, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. This contest is open to residents of the U.S. only. Entrants must be at least 18 years of age. If a winner is a minor, the prize will be awarded in the name of the winner's parent or legal guardian, who is solely responsible for all applicable federal, state, and local taxes. If a winner is a minor, that winner must also provide a signed parental or guardian consent form, provided by the sponsor, within seven days of notification attempt Failure of the minor to return the guardian consent form will result in the forfeiture prize and selection of an alternate winner, who will be chosen through a random drawing from the remaining eligible entries. Return of any prize or prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. The winners may be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within seven days of receipt; failure to do so upon request will result in forfeiture of the prize. By acceptance of the prize, the winners agree to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Neither Future US nor New Line Cinema is responsible for any damages or expenses that winners might incur as a result of this contest or the receipt of any prize. Winners are responsible for paying any income taxes on the value of the prize received. Void in Vermont, Rhode Island, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law.


BECOME JASON BOURNE AND...
TEEN
T
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Mild Language
Use of Alcohol and Tobacco
Violence
XBOX 360
PLAYSTATION 3
HIGHMOON STUDIOS
SIERRA

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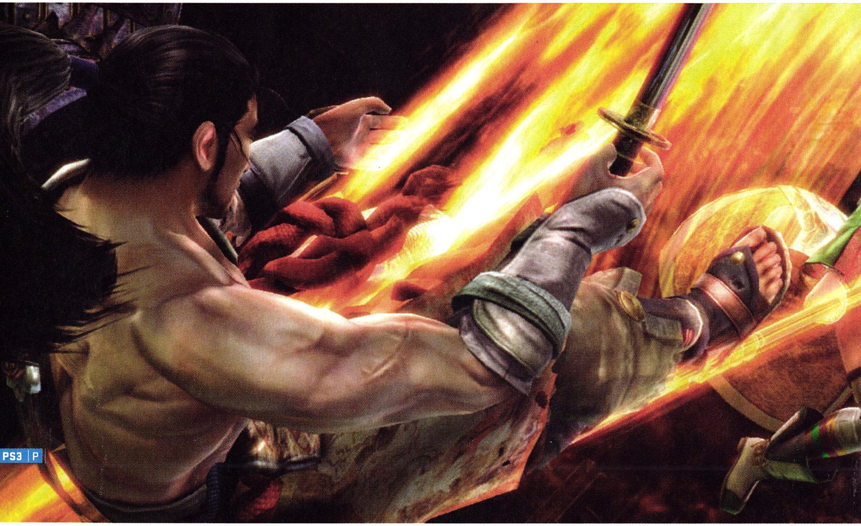


Running at a swift 60 fps at 720p, the speed and characters of *Soulcalibur IV* mark it as one of the most visually impressive games we've seen on PS3.

Soulcalibur IV

Hands-On Preview

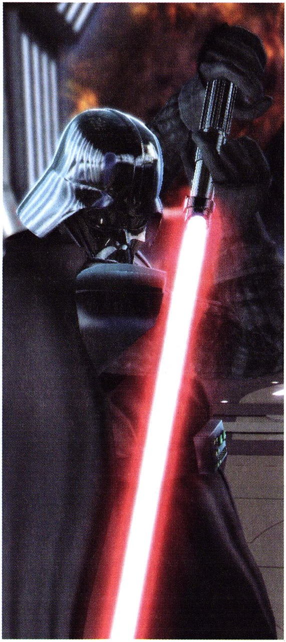
Ready for the ring-outs, we go hands-on with the stylish brawler

PS3 AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Fighting PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai

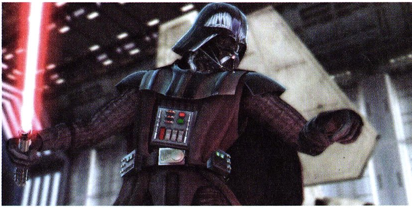
Once upon a time fighting games ruled the PlayStation, with a vicious horde of titles furiously brawling it out for the top spot. These days, the fighting genre isn't nearly as crowded as it once was—which puts Namco's latest *Soulcalibur* release front and center of hopes and expectations for fans of both the series and this under-represented gameplay style. The good news for all the above: The series' graduation to PlayStation 3 has brought with it some breathtaking detail in the cast of characters along with the much-anticipated appearance of online multiplayer.

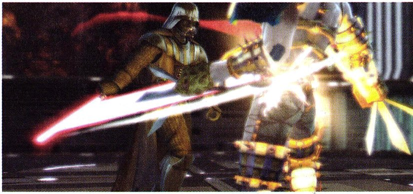
The fighter roster has gradually been dribbled out to eager fans, and now it seems that 20 characters will return from past iterations, with four more to be introduced as bonuses. Much has been made of Darth Vader's appearance on PS3; you'll be able to play him right from the start without having to complete levels or do any unlocking. What you'll get is a Vader who can use Force powers as well as lay the *Star Wars* smackdown with his lightsaber. When playing as Vader a second bar appears under the health meter to indicate

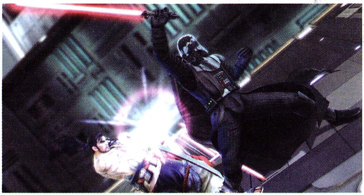
Vader's lightsaber will make all the official swoosh sounds, but he has to be careful using the Force. If you use a Force attack when your bar is empty, you'll take damage yourself.



> What you'll get is a Vader who can use Force powers as well as lay the *Star Wars* smackdown with his lightsaber.







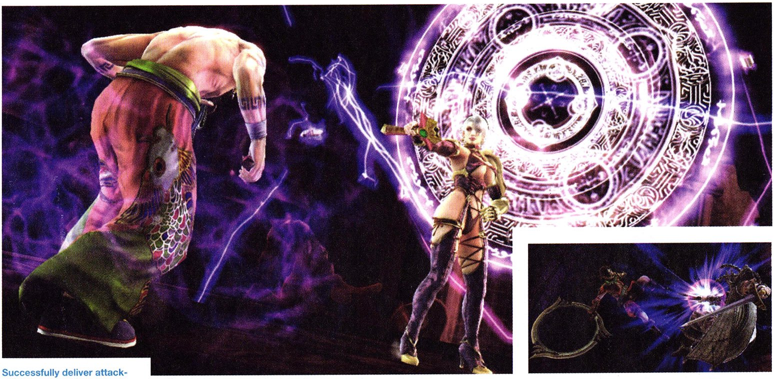
The in-game character models are, if you'll excuse the cliché, simply unreal. They're truly the stuff of next-gen.

how much Force power you have. It's replenished by successfully landing blows on your opponent and allows you to Force push and grip opponents. Meanwhile, your lightsaber will automatically block attacks if you're positioned correctly to repel the effort. Force gripping a fool, lifting them dramatically off their feet, then smacking them about with the lightsaber while they're defenseless is the kind of bad-assedness that will attract *Star Wars* fans who are not typically beat 'em-up players to this game. It is, however, somewhat humbling in a canon-breaking way to see Lord Vader slump to the floor if he gets bested. Must practice more, clearly.

Other new characters include Hildegard (Hilde for short), a full armor-wearing knight who wields a long spear for distance attacks and a short sword for close-up stabs. Hilde's visual design is interesting in itself since she's so fully clothed! This sartorial deviance stands out particularly when you see her fighting a character like Taki, who seems to be, ahem, falling out of one of her two outfits during every battle. As a spectator, that can be a little distracting (and may be a useful tactic in the online battles). Every character has two selectable outfits—aside from Vader, who just wears the trademark black suit.

Knock it off

From a gameplay perspective, *Soulcalibur IV's* director, Katsutoshi Sasaki, revealed fairly significant tweaks to the formula to us. The on-screen interface includes an orb—the soul gauge—that changes color depending on the attacks you land or hits you take. "In past games you could block your way to safety," Sasaki told us. "We had guard breaking in the past, but it was very difficult to do so a lot of players didn't manage it. We want to make the player always feel like attacking. We're forcing players to be aggressive or pay the price." That direction has translated into each character (except Vader) having pieces of their outfit that can be broken off. Land a



Successfully deliver attacking blows and your soul gauge will turn black—again reinforcing the design direction of forcing players to be aggressive.

Get in line to fight online

Namco's new Active Matching Battlesystem (AMB) works as a kind of king-of-the-hill matchmaking system with the active matching gauge at the bottom of the multiplayer screen indicating who's on deck to fight you. You begin with a 199-second timer. If you pummel an opponent and deliver a swift knockout, your foe will be kicked way to the back of the gauge line with the timer ticking down, limiting their chance to get back in and win the round. Staying in the arena is tough, however, as you don't replenish health when a new opponent on the gauge enters. Only if you've knocked everyone out far enough will you start to regenerate health. You also begin each round wherever you ended the last one, meaning that if you were teetering on the edge of a ring out, a new opponent may get a chance to knock you out quickly. It'll take serious skills to remain king of the online hill.

powerful attack against a blocking opponent and their soul gauge will change color. When it reaches red and starts flashing, that's the sign to execute a critical finish that, if nailed, will cause an instant death, regardless of how much health your target has at that point. Using a relatively simple up, down, and kick combo is all that's needed to deliver this killing blow, presented with a suitably stylish, devastating cut scene animation. Each character has three pieces of armor (high, mid, and low) that allow you to keep targeting a specific location to knock that armor off and aim for the critical finish.

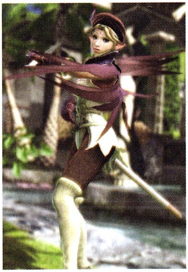
As is traditional for the franchise, ring-outs are possible in the arenas that feature moving and breakable scenery. The designers are using the Havok physics system on objects, including the armor that breaks off. By the end of a brawl, the arena might be littered with debris that can be kicked and moved around as you're leaping, dodging, punching, and kicking.

With our hands on the controller, the action was certainly fast and visually impressive. Vader controlled very smoothly, and in the hangar level that we played on, he looked perfectly at home Force pushing chumps, blocking with the lightsaber, and counter-attacking with impressive effect. Each of the other characters play with much the same style as they did in previous games, with the bigger characters keeping smaller, faster tykes at bay with long-range attacks. With the addition of online play (see sidebar), we expect *Soulcalibur IV* to generate a lot of attention come launch.

Rob Smith

From character design to visual effects, *Soulcalibur IV* looks spectacular on PS3.

Special attention has been given to the physics impact of unsupported bosoms jiggling and flopping with each leap, slash, and thrust!



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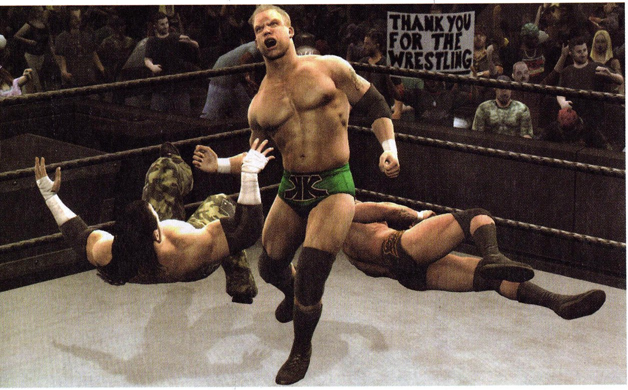
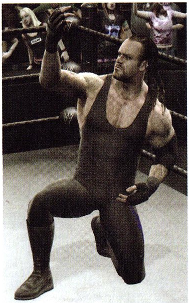


The fans have been heard; developer Yuke's focused on improving collision detection, artificial intelligence, and the blow-by-blow commentary.



The moves and mannerisms of the real WWE fighters add to the spectacle.

WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009

First Look Preview

It's still real to *me*, damn it!

PS3 | P

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Q4 **GENRE:** Wrestling/Fighting **PUBLISHER:** THQ **DEVELOPER:** Yuke's Media Creations

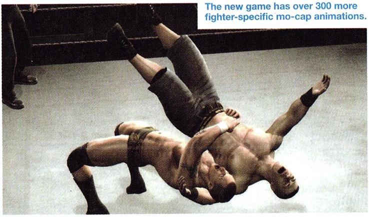
Come on, THQ—tell us what you *really* think: "We are definitely going to knock you on your ass."

It's not exactly what one expects to hear at a morning press conference—but it was just prior to Wrestlemania XXIV, (which took place in Orlando, Florida this past March). Actually, that quote comes courtesy of THQ senior creative manager Cory Ledesma, showing his typical reserve, talking about the forthcoming *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009.* The way some of these game companies relentlessly hype their next, newest titles makes the more easily-excitable gamers amongst us want to bust out with some of our own custom, vengeful wrestling moves…and this time around, by God, it looks like we'll be able to do *exactly* that.

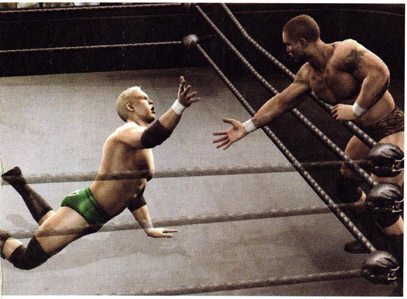
It's genuinely gratifying—and pleasantly surprising—to learn that a game design team is actually listening and acting on gamer feedback and coming back into the ring with specific, tangible results. *SmackDown* grapples with a fistful of persistent gripes—complaints and suggestions from series fans that centered on five key areas.

First on the canvas: Loading times. In a branch of entertainment fueled by turnbuckle dives, fast food, hard rock entrance themes, pyrotechnic displays, damn near daily betrayal theatrics and "Xtreme" energy drinks, patience is not a prized virtue. THQ is definitely talking big on this count, boasting a full fifty-percent decrease in load times, including match menus and cut scene loads.

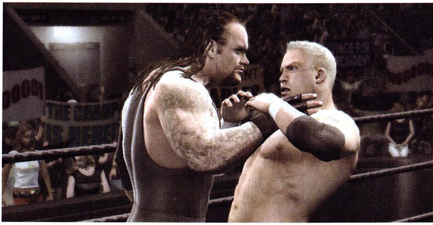
Next: Artificial Intelligence. It might seem a somewhat passive, secondary concern in a pro wrestling game, but the fans have spoken, or grunted, or whatever. Rather than make another set of tweaks for '09, developer Yuke's is rebuilding the entire game system from the ground up, with an eye toward more believable, intelligent opponents in general and even towards custom superstar AI characteristics, meant to reflect the specific personalities and idiosyncrasies of particular wrestlers. After all, a traditionally hot-headed, bicep-kissing egomaniacal type of fighter is



The new game has over 300 more fighter-specific mo-cap animations.



Make your own WWE drama with the "hot" and "blind" tag schemes.



"Um...could I get a little help here?" A shared Momentum Meter means that if you're doing badly, your tag-team partner is doing badly.

going to come at you on a different tack than, say, a more coldly-calculating…um, bicep-kissing, egomaniacal type.

Third up in *SmackDown's* technical tag team of tweaks: Commentary. Apart from actively lousy hit detection, nothing can quite kill the mood of wrestling games faster than hearing the same commentator-quips over and over again, or hearing some earnest, observational gem like "Ooh, that's gotta hurt!" at some contextually inappropriate moment. The designers make a point of citing major enhancements in the commentary scheme to eliminate issues of line repetition and to introduce more relevant, play-by-play calling—Halle-freakin'-*lleujah* to that, right there. In fact, three different commentary teams have recorded dialogue in the name of variety; like a mile-wide bonfire of Nancy Grace books, baggy hip-hop pants, and *Phantom Menace* DVDs, it's a good start.

The animation scheme will also be getting a boost, seeing refinements to the blending system, added animations for all new features in the game (more on these below), and a whopping 300 additional smooth motion capture moves for the various superstars.

Finally, we're assured that the core hit-detection is getting worked over, in response to player complaints of less-than-perfectly-connecting punches and kicks, as well as missed, otherwise elaborate dive attacks from atop the turnbuckle, which can make your onscreen superstar look particularly silly. (And when you're a screaming, oath bellowing, two-hundred-something-pound sack of muscle-bound Spam crammed into thrice undersized Technicolor shorts, with the eye makeup running down your cheeks in black rivulets from your scripted tears of frustration, fury, and vengeance, the last thing you want to do is look, y'know, *silly).*

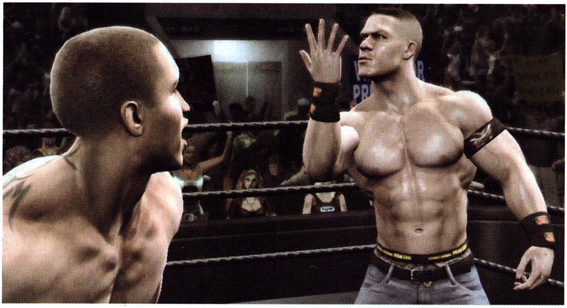
Bring a Buddy

Among *SmackDown's* brand new features is the Tag Team Match, which, obviously, encourages you to truly function as a team. It also drives home the point that, if your partner's not doing well, then *you're* not doing well—a sort of "Leave no no-neck behind" approach. As such, both player/partners share the same Momentum Meter, and will be able to pull off new Double Team Finisher moves.

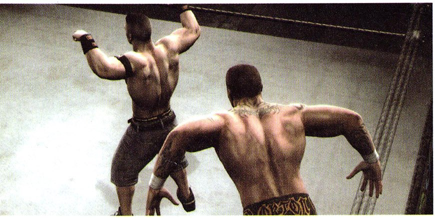
If anything in *SmackDown* can be said to approach visionary brilliance, it's the Tag Team scheme. The other player actually has something to *do* while he's waiting: Get the crowd worked up with gestures and attitude! Skirt around the apron and distract the ref, thus clearing the way for the other team member to do something illegal and nasty like nailing your opponent *(Clang!)* in the back of the head with a folding chair. Nobody was sitting in it anyway, right? Damn straight.

If even that is just a little too subtle for your tastes, why not just hold the opposing fighter from behind the ropes, so your teammate can wail on him with fists, feet, chairs, stepladders, signs, soda bottles or whatever ringside detritus comes to hand?

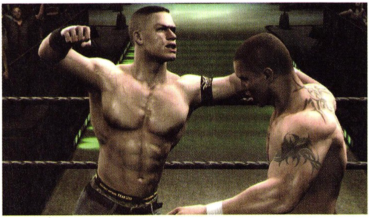
Pro wrestling is all about the drama, and *SmackDown* aims to let you create a little of your own through the "hot tag" scheme. If your partner in the ring is really getting abused and he's crawling toward you on bruised limbs, hand extended in supplication to tag him the hell out of the soup, that's reasonably dramatic. But it's more dramatic to lean over the ropes, meet him half way, tag him out and go stomping onto the canvas in an avenging storm of kicks and punches, turning the tables on your adversary.



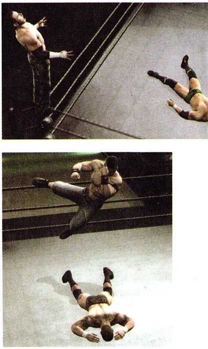
The ability to redirect attention is a key tag-team skill that requires precise timing and coordination. So while you're taunting your opponent with a friendly gesture or two, your buddy should be preparing to brain-pan this guy with a chair.



Pump up the crowd with attitude and gestures…but do mind the inbound man-meat airstrikes from Turnbuckle City.



"This…is…what…you…get…for… copying my haircut!"



Forge your own hellacious, custom moves with the in-depth Create-A-Finisher editor.

New double team animations are part of the upgrades alongside environmental details—particularly in the audience, packed full of unique, independently-moving fans holding up signs that will feature either the names of the particular fighters involved or various humorous slogans like "The Guy Behind Me Can't See" or—as one sign seen at the actual, real-world Wrestlemania XXIV read: "It's still real to *me,* damn it!"

Make Your Moves

An upgrade to the Road to Wrestlemania season mode is that it's no longer a generic, catchall gauntlet through which you treadmill one fighter after another. Instead, it's now a true story mode, specifically tooled to showcase the various histories, personalities, grudges, and quirks of a select group of real world WWE personalities as they make their way from the Royal Rumble all the way to their superstar moment—Wrestlemania.

Further, we're told there will also be a co-op Tag Team storyline, with the obligatory helpings of drama, betrayals and twists of fate, which can culminate in you deciding whether you want to remain as a team, or go your separate ways. It's an intriguing idea if it works, but we haven't seen the proposed mode in action yet.

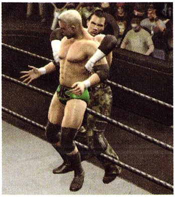
The new Create-A-Finisher (Move) function is so cool and ambitious that it's a little scary. It lets you literally create your own finish-moves from a library of existing animations—which can be strung together to form a fluid, convincing-looking, and completely original way to dust an opponent. You can even tweak the play speed of the various connected animation segments (to over 100-percent speed, if you're in that kind of mood) to achieve the perfect dramatic effect, and top the whole thing off by adding in hand gestures, chest pounds, bicep kisses and so forth, before giving it an original name. From what we've seen, you could easily spend hours on this one feature alone.

Finally, *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009* is slated to offer new online features—new match types, game modes, and of course, new WWE stars. Alas, as was the case with the equally new downloadable content, THQ was staying schtum on these particulars. Even so, what we have seen from *SmackDown,* gave even the not-so-hardcore among us reason to smile.

That, and the press conference slideshow image of a THQ coffee mug sitting on a "coaster" made from a *TNA Impact!* game disc. Oh, *Smack!*

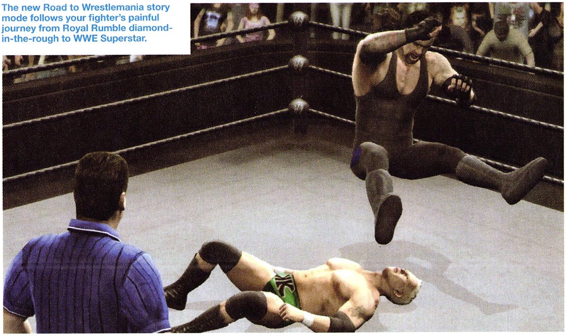
Chris Hudak

PS3 | P



Even the guy outside the ropes can make himself useful.

The new Road to Wrestlemania story mode follows your fighter's painful journey from Royal Rumble diamond-in-the-rough to WWE Superstar.



do you have what it takes?
navy.com/eod

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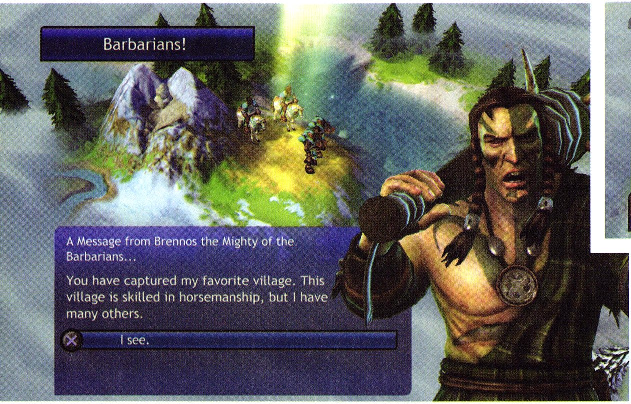
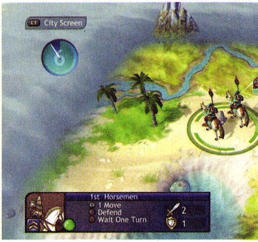


Barbarians!

A Message from Brennos the Mighty of the Barbarians...

You have captured my favorite village. This village is skilled in horsemanship, but I have many others.

War isn't the only choice. Through peace treaties, you can negotiate, trade, and acquire skills like horsemanship, as portrayed above.



As you explore and dissipate the fog of war, you'll discover a lush, detailed environment.

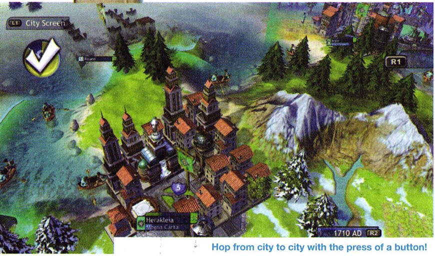
PS3 | P

Sid Meier's

Civilization Revolution

Prepare for the dawn of Civilization on PS3

PS3 AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Strategy PUBLISHER: 2K Games DEVELOPER: Firaxis Games



Hop from city to city with the press of a button!

For many console gamers, civilization began with the advent of the PlayStation. But PC gamers know differently: *Civilization* has been around since the early '90s, back in the ancient days of floppy disks and MS-DOS. In the almost two decades since its conception, the classic strategy series has induced millions of players to politically and militarily build an empire, turn by turn, from the Stone Age to the present—and in the process, the series has earned the reputation of being the flagship turn-based strategy franchise. On the PC, that is.

So what does it mean for PlayStation owners when legendary designer Sid Meier claims that *Civilization Revolution*—the series' first delve into a format created exclusively for consoles—will not only be worthy of its *Civilization* namesake, but will actually be the best *Civ* game ever?

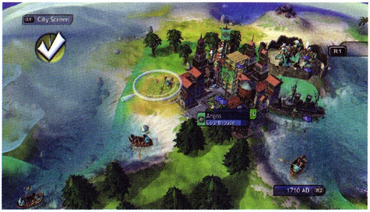
"We feel very confident that *Civ Revolution* is the answer to strategy on consoles," Meier says. "In many ways this is the *Civ* experience I've always wanted to create: fast-paced, visually immersive, easy to pick up and play (yet challenging to master), competitive multiplayer—and the amazing processing power of the PS3 allows me to finally deliver this experience to gamers."

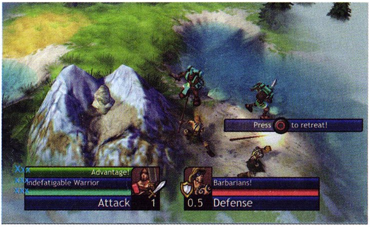
The basic concept of *Revolution* is the same as in the previous *Civ* games: nurture a small group of settlers into a cultured, technologically advanced, and expansion-minded civilization through careful management of resources (wood, food), diplomacy (peace treaties, trade negotiations), and military might. As your civilization flourishes, you develop more sophisticated skills (metalworking, literacy), construct fabulous historical monuments (like the Great Wall of China), and attract Great People to your civilization. Eventually you advance to new eras, until you've finally taken over the entire world.

So what makes *Revolution* more appealing than its PC predecessors? Well, on the PC, the entire process of world

emen
200 BC R2

With 16 different civilizations, you'll see a nice variety of architechure.





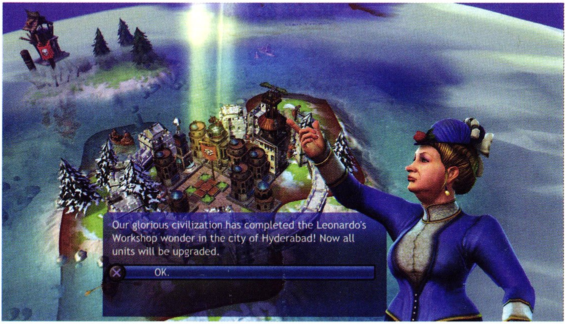
domination could take upwards of 10 hours. Yes, even in a multiplayer game. In *Revolution,* on the other hand, the experience has been tightened up significantly. Meier promises that matches can be finished "in a few hours or less"—but not at the cost of content. "Since *Civilization* is a turn-based game, we didn't have to sacrifice any of the depth," Meier says. "The depth comes from the way all of the individual decisions add up to create something epic...you'll still experience all of the goodness that is *Civ* and the whole sweep of time from the Stone Age to the space age, but now you can become the most powerful ruler in the world in an evening. And even have time to do it again."

In addition to the snappier gameplay, the game has an improved visceral punch. "We've really ramped up the visual and sound presentation to match the addictive gameplay. From the amazing special effects, to intense action-packed combat, to the beautiful terrain...we think you will find that this is the best looking and most fun game of *Civ* ever."

Simply, if anyone is going to nail bringing a successful turn-based strategy formula to the PS3 we'd bet good money that Sid Meier is that guy.

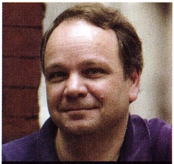
Will the upgraded graphics and faster gameplay make *Civ* the absolute best in the franchise? That matters less to us than whether those same elements will place the too-oft-neglected turn-based-strategy genre onto the PS3 radar. We're hoping it will. In which case, we ask, "Pinky, are you pondering what I'm pondering?"

Teresa Dun



Our glorious civilization has completed the Leonardo's Workshop wonder in the city of Hyderabad! Now all units will be upgraded.

Wonders can be built by any culture. So the Pyramids can be erected in Japan and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in South America.



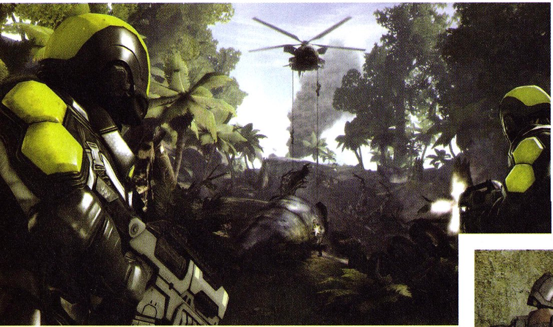
A Civilized Chat With Sid Meier

Why did you decide to make a console-only version of *Civilization?*
SM: The two main reasons we decided to bring *Civ* to consoles now is that the current generation of hardware allows us to really push the presentation of the game to a new level, and we think console gamers are ready for a new kind of game experience.

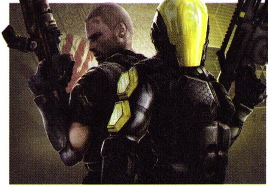
What's different when developing for PS3?
Since this was new territory for us, there was a pretty steep learning curve for developing on the PS3 at first, so that was a challenge. Once we got past that, the development process has been the same as with any of our games. One advantage to developing on consoles is that we're working with one piece of defined hardware, whereas PC development requires us to accommodate many different types of hardware with our code—which can be enormously challenging at times.

Tell us what you think is the most exciting element in *Revolution.*
It's hard to narrow it down to just one, but I'm very excited about our "Game of the Week" feature. Each week Firaxis will offer a new single-player map that people can play all week on their PS3. At the end of the week you post your best score online and see how you stack up against players around the world. We will declare a new "Best *Civ* Player In The World" each week and I'm sure there isn't a *Civ* fan on the planet who won't want to capture that title at least once.

How do you personally like to play the game? What aspects of your civilization do you prefer to develop first?
One of the things I like best about *Civ* is that you will never play the same game twice. Each game will put you in a new place, playing against different civs that will challenge you to come up with a different strategy than the last game. I have as much fun winning the game by building up my military power and capturing all of the enemy capitals as I do building the best equipped spaceship and beating everyone else to Alpha Centauri, or acquiring huge amounts of wealth and controlling the world, or by peacefully spreading my culture and growing my civilization into a world power.



When high on Nectar, Mantel soldiers transform into the strongest, fastest, and happiest killing machines on the planet.



As Shane Carpenter, you'll play a pivotal role in both sides of the war between Mantel Global Industries and The Promise Hand.

Haze

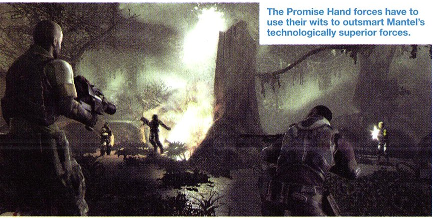
Hands-On Preview

Shooting high—this is your game on drugs

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Summer **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Free Radical

On the surface, *Haze* looks like another pretty yet stereotypical shooter that'll pit you against the usual freedom-hating terrorist-types. But peel away *Haze's* outer skin and you'll find a plot ripe with deception and some compelling action at its core.

You enter this futuristic setting as Shane Carpenter, a new recruit for the forces of good at Mantel Global Industries. As a freshly minted officer in the world's largest private army, Carpenter finds himself on a mission to put the kibosh on The Promise Hand, a sinister terrorist organization. It seems like a fairly cut-and-dried "us versus them" scenario, but something's not quite right. Your testosterone-fueled teammates seem like the usual jock caricatures you've seen in other shooters, but soon their gratuitous smack talking and unusual enthusiasm for killing becomes somewhat unnerving.



The Promise Hand forces have to use their wits to outsmart Mantel's technologically superior forces.

It's mostly because of the drugs. Mantel's soldiers use a lot of them and you will too. Thanks to their "nutritional supplement," Nectar, Mantel can offer their customers the most deadly, efficient, and happy soldiers on the planet. In short, Nectar makes good soldiers better. While on the field, you can hold down and release the L2 button to administer a dose of the sweet substance into your bloodstream. When high on Nectar, enemies are highlighted in an eerie glow, making them easy to identify and snipe from a distance. It'll also heighten your senses, allowing you to sense the direction of incoming fire, and produce a tenfold increase to the damage of your melee attacks inflict.

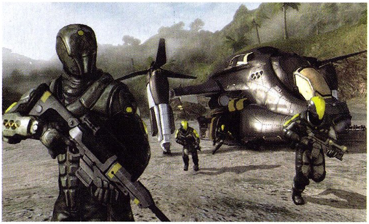
After you receive a Nectar dose a rainbow-tinted glow washes over your visor, giving the game a euphoric aspect as you shoot down the clean-cut silhouettes of enemies with steely surgical precision.

Drugs are bad, m'kay!

But it's not long before Carpenter begins to notice the drug's alarming side effects. Nectar overdoses are dangerous on the battlefield. Hold down L2 for too long while administrating it and your body won't be able to take the strain on its systems. While under the shock of an overdose, your yellow honeycombed suit will flare up in angry shades of red and you'll start firing your weapon and throwing grenades haphazardly, making yourself a serious threat to your teammates and the mission.

PS3 exclusive?

When asked about how exclusive *Haze* is likely to remain to the PS3 platform, script writer Rob Yescombe dismissed the idea that *Haze* will eventually be available for the PC or 360. It's ours. All ours.

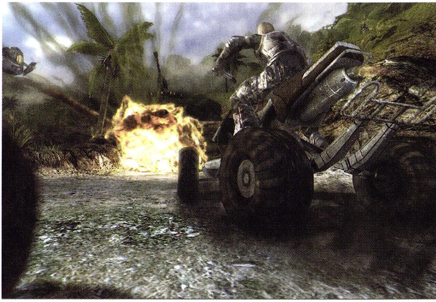


Thanks to their special "medicine," Mantel's mercenaries can power through most situations.

It becomes apparent that friendly-fire related shenanigans are the least of Carpenter's worries when he learns that the drug also alters his perception of reality. While on the hunt for the leader of The Promise Hand, your suit experiences a Nectar disruption error. For a brief moment, the previously empty room is suddenly littered with the mutilated corpses of civilians. Your once clean hands are now covered with a thick coat of blood, and a harsh black-and-white filter washes over your field of vision, disrupting the harmonious Nectar-induced illusion.

Happy soldiers are easier to manipulate, and with its mind-altering meds, the Mantel organization can shield their troops from the psychological impact of the atrocities they've committed, tricking them into thinking that they're fighting the good fight. But if the cake is a lie, then so is Mantel's Nectar—and its effects counter any allegations that *Haze* glorifies drug use.

Without revealing the entire plot, what Carpenter learns about Mantel's true intentions will eventually lead him to ditch his junkie teammates to fight alongside The Promise Hand rebels. Once Carpenter is clean and sober, you won't be able to depend on Nectar-fueled killing sprees to power your way through levels. Instead, you'll have to use keen resourceful tactics to fight against the technologically superior Mantel army.

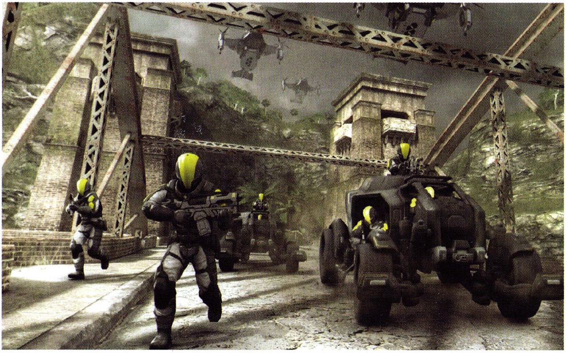


Nectar isn't *Haze's* only sweet substance. Exquisite explosions offer extra eye candy throughout the game.

Since Nectar shields its users from disturbing images, Mantel troops can't see corpses, so you'll find yourself playing dead to dodge certain death, and rising from the grave to flank the enemy for surprise attacks. Well-placed shots to the Nectar administrators on the backs of Mantel soldiers and Nectar-fused grenades can also trigger overdoses, turning your enemies against each other.

The more strategic style of play when fighting for The Promise Hand neatly mirrors the one-man-army feeling you get when serving Mantel's forces. But throughout the whole game, you'll notice how well *Haze's* subtle "shaky cam" effect works. Instead of feeling like you're gliding around on air, it feels like there's weight to your weapons when firing or even when you're just walking down a path.

Although *Haze's* single-player experience looks like it'll be the game's main attraction, the ability to play through the campaign in four-player co-op is more than welcome. But watching our friends' backs and reviving them will never be as fun to us as smacking them upside the head. Luckily, multiplayer Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and Team Assault modes should further sweeten the deal. Our hands-on time with a late build definitely impressed and it appears that the development team has been given the tweak and polish time to ensure *Haze* will contend with the top PS3 shooters. Tyler Nagata



"We do more drugs before 9:00 than most people do in their entire day." You may not want to join Mantal Global Industries for social networking purposes, but four-player co-op looks like a good excuse to make some new friends on PSN.

Free Radical's future

According to its official website, Free Radical is working on *TimeSplitters 4* as well as a mysterious "top secret" project with LucasArts. Could news on *Star Wars: Battlefront 3* be coming soon?

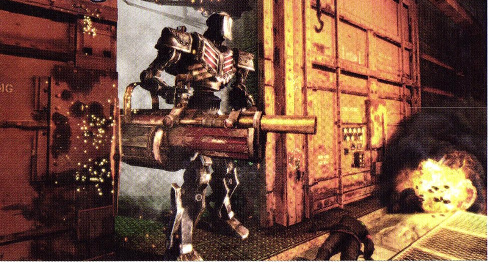
PlayStation Gallery

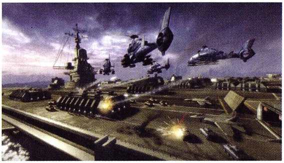
Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

Damnation

PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Blue Omega Entertainment

Don't be fooled by the cowboy hats. In this Old West-meets-cybernetic-future shooter, the gunfire won't be limited to slow, deliberate duels at high noon—you'll be somersaulting through the air, guns blazing, in what Codemasters terms a "shooter gone vertical". The developer promises a heavy emphasis on vehicles; we're hoping that means armored horses galloping into the sunset bearing Stetson-clad silhouettes. We'll let you know if our frontier fantasy comes true in our next preview of this intriguing mash-up of Wild West action with steampunk style. TD





Tom Clancy's EndWar

PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Strategy PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Shanghai

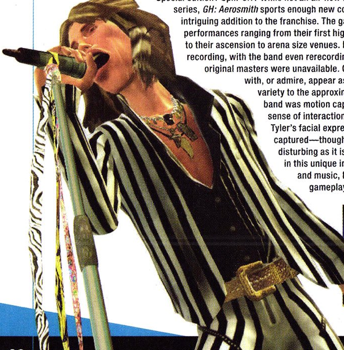
It's the end of the world as we know it, and we feel fine. Actually, it may be the end of strategy games as we know them as Ubisoft's newest Tom Clancy franchise offering aims to deliver genre-busting access to the battlefields of World War III. Designed exclusively for consoles (no more PC strategy game hand-me-downs) *EndWar* utilizes voice command to control the fast-paced action. The goal is to provide a field general-like experience with the emphasis on fast-paced tactical combat instead of the micromanagement of units. The focus on innovation carries over online as well as Ubisoft plans to create a new standard for console multiplayer action with persistent battles for hundreds of participants that can last months. If these screenshots are any indication of what to expect, we can't wait to enlist. RB

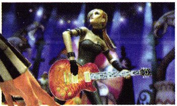
Guitar Hero:

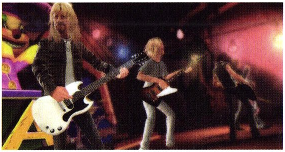
Aerosmith

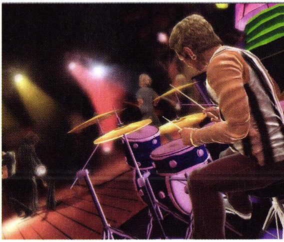
PS3, PS2 AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Music PUBLISHER: RedOctane DEVELOPER: Neversoft (PS3), Budcat (PS2)

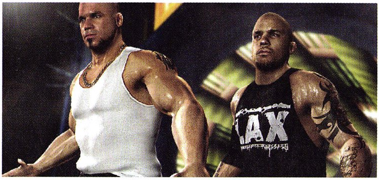
Special edition? Spin-off? While not an all-new installment in the venerable *Guitar Hero* series, *GH: Aerosmith* sports enough new content and gameplay refinements to be an intriguing addition to the franchise. The game chronicles the band's career path with performances ranging from their first high school gig and early club appearances to their ascension to arena size venues. Every Aerosmith song is from a master recording, with the band even rerecording some early-career tracks when the original masters were unavailable. Other artists that the band has performed with, or admire, appear as opening acts in the game, and help add variety to the approximately 40 song set list. Each member of the band was motion captured for the game imbuing an authentic sense of interaction between the group members. Even Steven Tyler's facial expressions and lip movements were motion captured—though we find this pursuit of authenticity as disturbing as it is admirable. Fans of Aerosmith will delight in this unique interactive recounting of the band's history and music, but *GH* fans should have plenty of solid gameplay to rock out on as well. RB

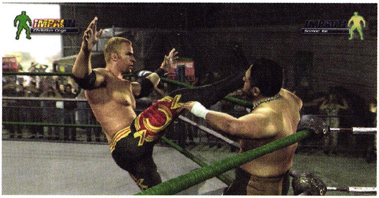












TNA Impact

PS3 AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Action Sports
PUBLISHER: Midway Games DEVELOPER: Midway L.A

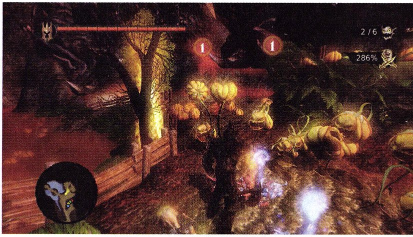
While the WWE and its requisite licensed games are the dominant professional wrestling franchise, a growing number of sports entertainment aficionados have taken notice of TNA's more acrobatic brand of brawling action. TNA may lack some of the marquis name firepower of the WWE, but it makes up for it with its signature six-sided ring and arguably higher-flying, faster-paced, and more punishing matches. Midway hopes to capitalize on the stylistic difference between the two organizations with a fast, immediate, and fluid gameplay experience more reminiscent of fighting games than traditional wrestling titles. With approximately 25 wrestlers, 11 different match types (including the brutal Ultimate X), and graphics that can be characterized as scary realistic, *TNA Impact* looks to be a serious new contender in the wrestling genre. RB

Overlord:

Raising Hell

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: Triumph Studios

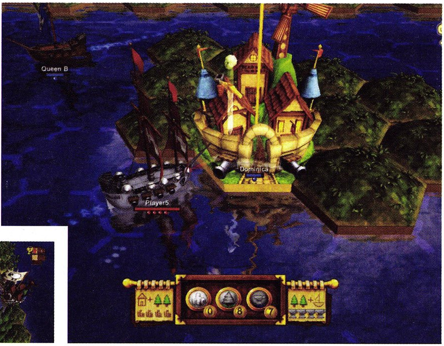
Idyllic pastures, bleating sheep, sunflower fields...such serene scenes are distasteful to the evil Overlord, but he's far too lofty to dirty his own hands. To assert his chaotic dominion in this third-person action/strategy game, he'll need to raise a mini-army of gremlin-like Minions to do his bidding. All he has to do is lift an arm and point, and his loyal subjects will burn, trash, and slaughter their way through one fantasy parody after another, from hobbit celebrations to hordes of angry dwarves. TD



Plunder

PS3 AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Action/Strategy
PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Certain Affinity

Without a doubt, *Plunder* is the cutest, breeziest, newbie-friendly downloadable hex-based, real-time, territorial-domination game you'll see on the PlayStation Network this year. Up to eight linked players command their own goofy little pirate galleons with the goal to sail out and bombard enemy port towns until they strike their colors and join your side. The mechanics are very simple, allowing you to concentrate on the constantly shifting strategic situation. Most possible actions—bombarding enemy ports, attacking opposing vessels or snagging valuable floating-crate power-ups—occur automatically once you move to any given hex; the challenge lies in seizing ports for supplies, precisely timing/coordinating your attacks at sea, properly upgrading your ships (for Armor, Speed or Firepower) back at the impregnable Pirate Lair. The best part? We get to use funny pirate voices while we play. CH



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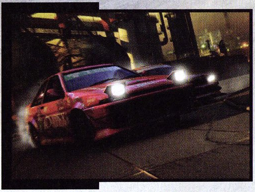
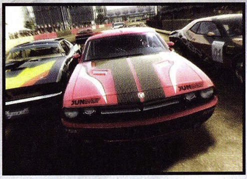


HEAD TO HEAD ONLINE MULTIPLAYER FOR 12 COMPETITORS



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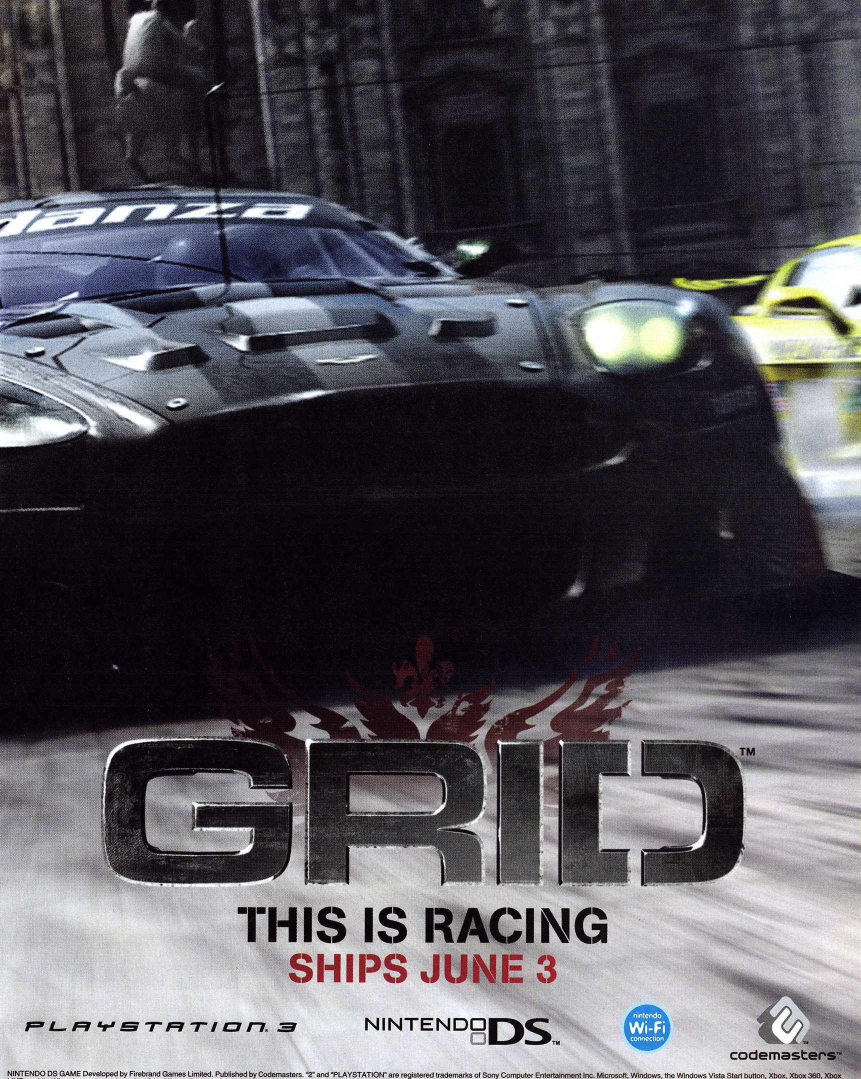
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Exclusive REVIEW

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 GENRE: Action/Crime ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games DEVELOPER: Rockstar North

Full Service
WASH $5.00
NITE
WASH $5.00
Full Service
WASH

Grand Theft Auto

by Rob Smith

BUMP!

“Crap!” I shout, reclining on an armchair as I rear end yet another taxi on Liberty City's crowded streets.

“Hey, a$$hole,” yells the cab driver, jumping out of the car, arms gesticulating wildly. “My car!”

“Oops,” I add, noticing flames billowing out from the cab's rear wheels. I quickly drive a safe distance away and turn to see the cab's passenger stumble out of the blazing vehicle engulfed in flame.

Suddenly the cab explodes, sending the burning passenger sailing like a comet through the night sky. I catch myself hoping that he was actually dead by now, and not suffering even more heinous pain.

Gazing back at the intersection, I see that another car is ablaze. Pedestrians run for cover. In a spark of civic duty I pull out my cell phone and dial 911. “Hello, you're through to the Liberty City emergency services…” I hit 3 for the fire department. Mere moments later, a fire truck screeches into view and parks just as another car explodes in this domino-effect inferno. Firemen run for cover, but their truck has caught some of the blast and is also ablaze. Seconds later, it explodes in a powerful orange and black plume of flame and smoke.

“Oops,” I offer again, before I get back in my car and drive slowly away as sirens sound in the distance and pedestrians flee the carnage, dodging out of the way of my erratic driving. “Nothing to see here folks, I wasn't there. I was dead at the time…” I offer under my breath. Another day, another simple, random, and utterly engrossing encounter in Liberty City.

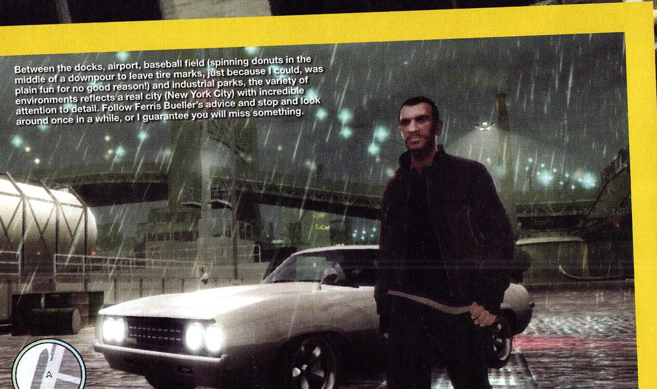
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice

IV

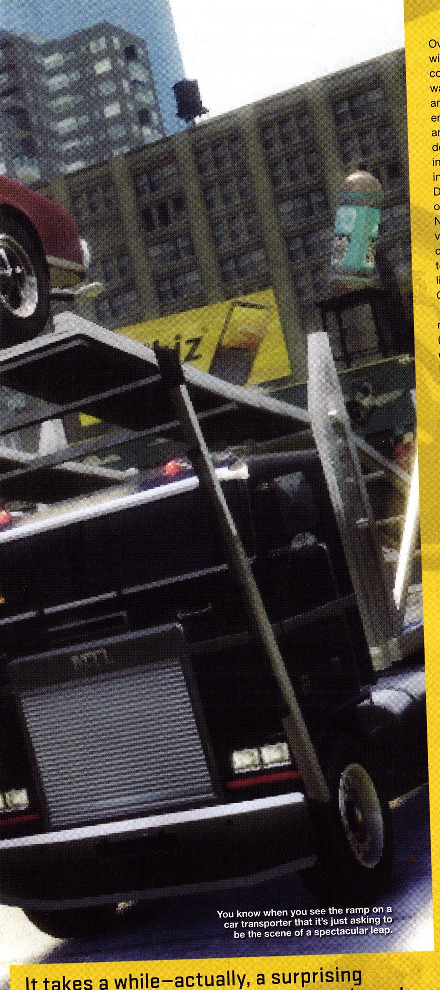
The highs and lows of everyday Joes

Maybe the result of his Eastern European origins, Niko displays some parkour skills that allow him to land without damage from significant heights, and also leap nimbly across the rooftops in thrilling foot races.

AUTHORIZED
DEALER



Between the docks, airport, baseball field (spinning donuts in the middle of a downpour to leave tire marks, just because I could, was plain fun for no good reason!) and industrial parks, the variety of environments reflects a real city (New York City) with incredible attention to detail. Follow Ferris Bueller's advice and stop and look around once in a while, or I guarantee you will miss something.



You know when you see the ramp on a car transporter that it's just asking to be the scene of a spectacular leap.

> It takes a while—actually, a surprising amount of time—for the mission style and structure to kick into a gear that makes you stop and say, "Wow."

Over 50 hours into *GTA IV*, with the single-player storyline concluded, I'm back in the city watching, wandering, driving, and looking for pigeons (apparently 200 flying rats can be found and exterminated!). I'm not yet done with Liberty City. I'm done in that I've seen Rockstar North's interpretation of the American Dream through the eyes and ears of Eastern European immigrant Niko Bellic, but this phenomenally vast and stylish environment clearly holds many more secrets to uncover. In many ways, it feels like the journey through and with *GTA IV* has only just begun.

Challenge number one as the near-15 minutes of credits roll by (a statement on the sheer number of people involved in bringing Liberty City to life): figure out where to start telling this story. How about a few lingering fears that the game's release delay, famously explained as being caused by technological challenges on the PS3, might ripple into the shipping version? Well, no fear there. System performance is superb, and despite the monumental draw distances across the cityscape, pop-in of background scenery is negligible (occasional building lights appeared suddenly, but for those keeping score, the PS3 did appear to perform a little better than what we witnessed on the Xbox 360).

So what is the biggest take away? The answer to that question is simple: Liberty City. Ostensibly Niko Bellic is the protagonist, but the scene stealer at virtually every turn is the city itself, and it permeates so much of the overall experience that its impact simply has to be played to be fully appreciated.

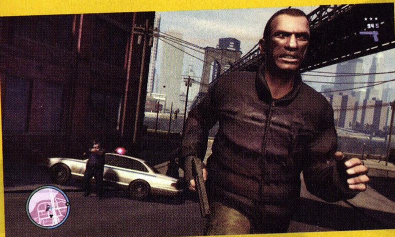
As Niko disembarks from the ship bringing him to the city, in search of his own American dream, he's met by his cousin, Roman, a brash immigrant himself with an eye on the prize, but undermined by his own personal demons (like an acute gambling habit). Roman's taxi company provides the first base of operations in the Broker district, a ramshackle part of town where the walls are stained with graffiti, the cars are old and battered, and the pedestrians perpetually annoyed and combative. Niko quickly becomes embroiled in Roman's problems with a Russian loan shark called Vlad. Through his own words, in conversation with Roman, and to himself, Niko establishes a desire for a fresh start, removed from the horrors he clearly witnessed in his war-torn homeland. But within mere moments of setting foot in the country he's "fixing" problems as only a *Grand Theft Auto* star can.

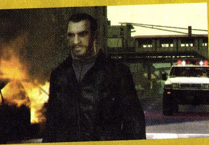
"OH, SOMEONE CALL THE NEWS."

GTA veterans will instantly feel at home with the early mission design. Driving beat up jalopies through crowded streets is quite a challenge. The suspension on these clunkers is clearly cast from jellied steel, resulting in some crazy caroms off parked vehicles, and a few too many accidental encounters with lampposts, dumpsters, and LCPD patrol cars (resulting in an instant one-star warning that means you have to burn out of the danger area flashing on the mini-map.) In fact, as the game progresses and the other boroughs of the city open up, revealing flashier rides with tighter handling and braking systems that don't take an entire city block to go from fast to stopped, it feels like the difficulty curve is inverted. I definitely lay some of the blame for my slow start on taking a digital approach to a distinctly analog control system. The R2 button needs to be finessed, not just thrust to full acceleration, and the L2 brake requires a controlled touch to assist in cornering and avoiding other traffic. The handbrake is also your friend, but even then, the chases seemed to get easier when I was able to 'jack the sweeter rides.

It takes a while—actually, a surprising amount of time—for the mission style and structure to kick into a gear that makes you stop and say, "Wow." Though it gets there eventually, your early meandering through low-scale shakedowns and petty crime don't deliver the kind of explosive start you might expect. Progress is steady; Niko's revelations about his own background and motivation are slow to emerge, and as you're introduced to new characters you have to try several missions for these friends to find out which ones will directly progress

While getting shot down respawns you at the emergency room, it costs you cash and forces a do-over of the mission...


The denizens of Liberty City, including the cops, come in all shapes and sizes. Leap a fence and this guy won't be able to catch you!


When you spark a one star warning level go grab a car and then take the shortest route to the edge of the warning area. Once there, look for other police cars honing in on your position. If you stop, and don't draw attention, you'll likely avoid other pursuing vehicles relaying your position to the rest of the chase party.

the story, and which are there as the asides to earn you the cash to buy munitions, body armor (a requirement before starting any mission), and other gear.

By the time you're handed a sniper rifle for a long-distance attack that then progresses up-close and personal through a construction site, the inventiveness of the mission design starts to improve. In each instance, it always seems likely that multiple solutions are possible to a particular situation, even if the characters introducing the missions direct you down a specific path. While getting shot down respawns you at the emergency room, it costs you cash and forces a do-over of the mission (or a reload of a save game). But that's a better outcome than getting arrested by the cops, which costs even more money and results in the confiscation of all your weapons. That's a painful penalty as the expense of replacing them at one of the weapons dealers can be exorbitant, and forces you to take on several friends' side missions of running, fetching, and stealing, just to earn the dough to get your criminal enterprise back on its feet.

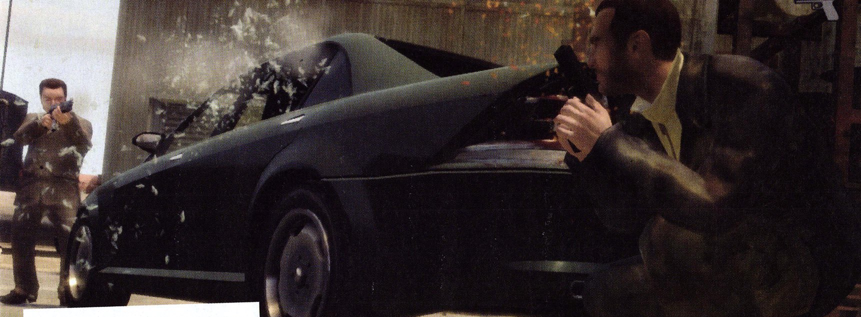
Actually, that's unfair. Niko doesn't run a criminal enterprise. He's not gunning for a position as a mob boss or making a power play. But his motivations are confused: in cut scenes he expounds a desire to free himself from violence yet he readily accepts the need to get ultra-violent with anyone he's directed towards if it looks like it'll pay. Characters Niko has barely met ask him to go execute someone (or several someones) and his response is always to get right on the job. Only late in the game does he suggest any remorse or awareness that he's saying one thing and doing another. Now, this could be pitched as a conflicted character getting by, but in fact it's plain inconsistent. It isn't until a girlfriend (romance plays a part in *GTA IV*, and is possibly the most fascinating relationship development in Niko's interactions with friends) almost off-handedly comments that he's a sociopathic killer that his true personality is nailed. A higher motivation of being "in search of someone" gives several of his execution missions a more readily apparent excuse, but the conflict (and inconsistency) in his message definitely puts the overall storyline in an odd perspective.

"STAY SAFE. STAY SECOND AMENDMENT."

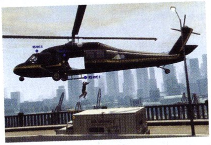
Still, so many of the characters you come across are unlikable, miserable sociopaths in their own right that it's hard to generate an appreciable affinity for any of them. Those feelings are put in acute perspective when you're given the chance on a handful of occasions to choose your own adventure, essentially selecting one of two actions and then dealing with the repercussions.

Ultimately, I suspect most players will find just getting through the missions themselves the motivating force, with this plot secondary to the action and exploration (be that surfing the internet (much of which is genuinely funny), finding a hooker (services

91 17
FOR LEASE
LAUNDROMAT
LIQUOR
CRIME
TAXI
GTA IV certainly earns its M rating. The language in the cut scenes is peppered with four letter words, and a couple of characters even drop the c-bomb. This game is NOT for kids.



Particle effects on shattering glass, dust, water puddles on the streets, as well as from flame and gunfire all give the environment a detailed feel.



Multiplayer Magic

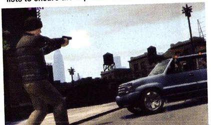
GTA IV's multiplayer will keep most gamers well occupied until downloadable content is available. The three four-player co-operative missions—Deal Breaker, Bomb da Base II, and Hangman's Noose (the best of the bunch)—are intense, and by ramping up the difficulty level, provide a varied challenge. But the heart of multiplayer lies in the 10 modes that allow you to earn stars (that unlock extra clothing options, shades, hats, etc.) while taking down friends and enemies alike.

Deathmatch (and its team variant) is obvious enough. Car Jack City (and the team version) involves everyone chasing after cars and getting specific rides to the extraction point. The gameplay can be frustrating if you're taken down en route to the objective, and if you get an unfortunate respawn you may never get close enough to have a chance. Same can be said for Mafiya Work where missions are delivered through your cell phone, forcing you to chase all over the area, and you need as much luck as skill to be in the right place at the right time.

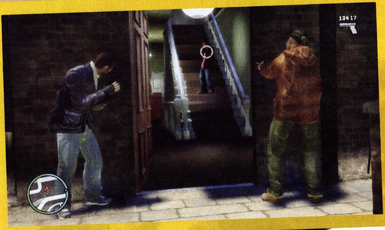
But Cops 'n' Crooks is a blast as hoodlum players are chased by cop players towards set objective points. This one is likely to be a star attraction alongside the races (regular and GTA Race) that each bring the best out of the vehicle and combat dynamics. And racing helicopters through checkpoints above the stunning cityscape is a thrill all of its own.

The free mode that lets you set up almost any dynamic for competitive play is quite possibly the star of the show. One idea that evolved was the King Kong mode that has one player armed with a rocket launcher atop Liberty City's own Empire State Building and all the other players hopping in choppers to try and take him out. This mode is as fun and versatile as the imagination of the online community allows.

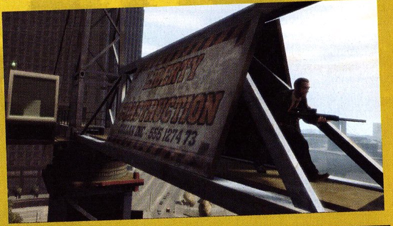
Each mode played smoothly in our playtest on PS3, and definitely encourages players to build friends lists to ensure the experience they want.



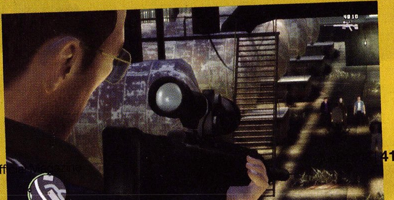
Alongside Little Jacob you cover the door (using R1), then peek out (using R2) for a chance at a headshot.



Wearing a suit to an assassination adds a touch of class. In fact, you can find additional missions through the police computer if you jack a cop car, and also assassination missions become a late game option to earn you extra dollars (and are also well designed).

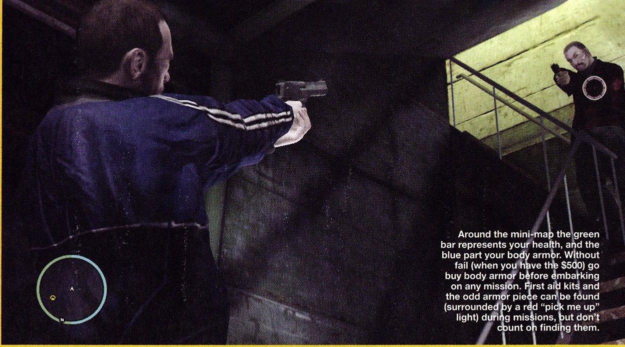


You're asked to cover your paymaster in case something bad goes down. No prizes for guessing what happens next.



available for $20, $50, or $70), or listening to the superbly written talk radio skits across the many varied radio stations).

On several occasions I found myself in situations that I was pretty convinced were unwinnable…before discovering an outlet or an option that turned the tide and allowed a magnificent getaway. In fact, failing missions can lead to better stories as the open world reacts to new stimuli. (Who knew it was possible to be run over in the water by a police patrol boat? After accidentally getting on a bridge that sparked a terrorist alert and six star warning, I hopped over the wall into the water in a desperate getaway attempt, only to be shmooshed by a pursuing boat!)

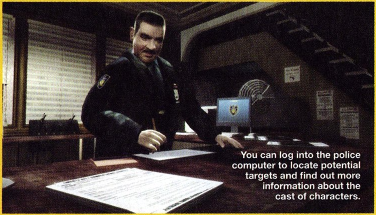

Around the mini-map the green bar represents your health, and the blue part your body armor. Without fail (when you have the $500) go buy body armor before embarking on any mission. First aid kits and the odd armor piece can be found (surrounded by a red "pick me up" light) during missions, but don't count on finding them.

> **Navigating around the city is made easy with the use of taxis. Hail a cab, hop in the back, and then select your destination…**

Navigating around the city is made easy with the use of taxis. Hail a cab, hop in the back, and then select your destination from the perfectly intuitive list of options (the game automatically puts your most likely choice of destinations first in the fare meter-cum-menu). You can pay just $2 for a ride if you're prepared to take the time, look out the window, and listen to the general inanity of the driver, or just hit X and insta-arrive at your destination for full fare.

The ride does let you catch up with friends using the cell phone. Each significant character you meet appears in your phone, and friends can be called just to set up dates, go to a comedy club (this one is so worth the surprise), or go to a cabaret. You can also go bowling and play pool or darts—casual mini-games that can be played for as long as you want. The phone also lets you receive text messages and even take pictures using the camera (used in a couple of original missions). Some missions are time sensitive so you have to act immediately to make the meet. If this kind of pressure gets in the way of your exploration, you can switch off your phone, essentially pausing the mission progression while you enjoy yourself. Then when you're ready to resume, switch the phone on and your acquaintances will begin ringing with jobs. You can also save between missions at any one of your safe houses across the city, change clothes there, and even watch TV (though the comedy skits are mostly a miss, a couple exceptions notwithstanding).

The jobs invariably involve getting yourself armed. The combat system is excellent; it's intuitive, and lets you fine-tune headshots with your own skill (worth practicing since making short work of targets is crucial in some of the more frenetic firefights, where the body count can reach 50 or more). Using cover is vital, and also works superbly. Hitting R1 puts you in cover behind a car, box, wall, whatever's handy. If you're moving towards a cover point when you hit R1 you'll perform a slick slide into safety. It helps keep you moving in missions that sprawl over large areas, and safe when facing seemingly overwhelming odds. Plus, it's just kinda cool.

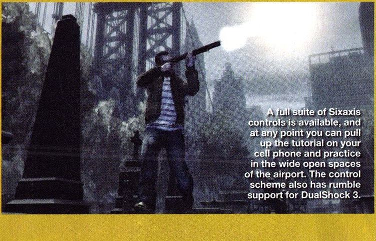

You can log into the police computer to locate potential targets and find out more information about the cast of characters.

"THIS TIME, IT WILL BE DIFFERENT"

Wherever you're driving, shooting, chasing, evading, or exploring, the city provides a spectacular and evolving backdrop. Depending on the time of day or the prevailing weather conditions, the look and feel of every location can change. The light cast across the spectacularly detailed facades, the slick road affecting car handling and causing footsteps to kick up splashes, the imposing skyscrapers, the flashing neon, it all changes with each passing street, hour, and weather system.

That's what you'll take away from *GTA IV,* along with the multiplayer gift that will keep on giving (see sidebar). The storyline? Not so much. The pace is indie movie slow, and the attitudes disconcerting. There is room for Niko's story to evolve further though the possibility of downloadable content, but what you'll remember from the story campaign are the events, like flying the helicopter and successfully completing a previously failed mission. Those takeaways involve so many hours of gameplay that this value packed Blu-ray easily warrants the purchase you were always going to make anyway.

★★★★★


A full suite of Sixaxis controls is available, and at any point you can pull up the tutorial on your cell phone and practice in the wide open spaces of the airport. The control scheme also has rumble support for DualShock 3.

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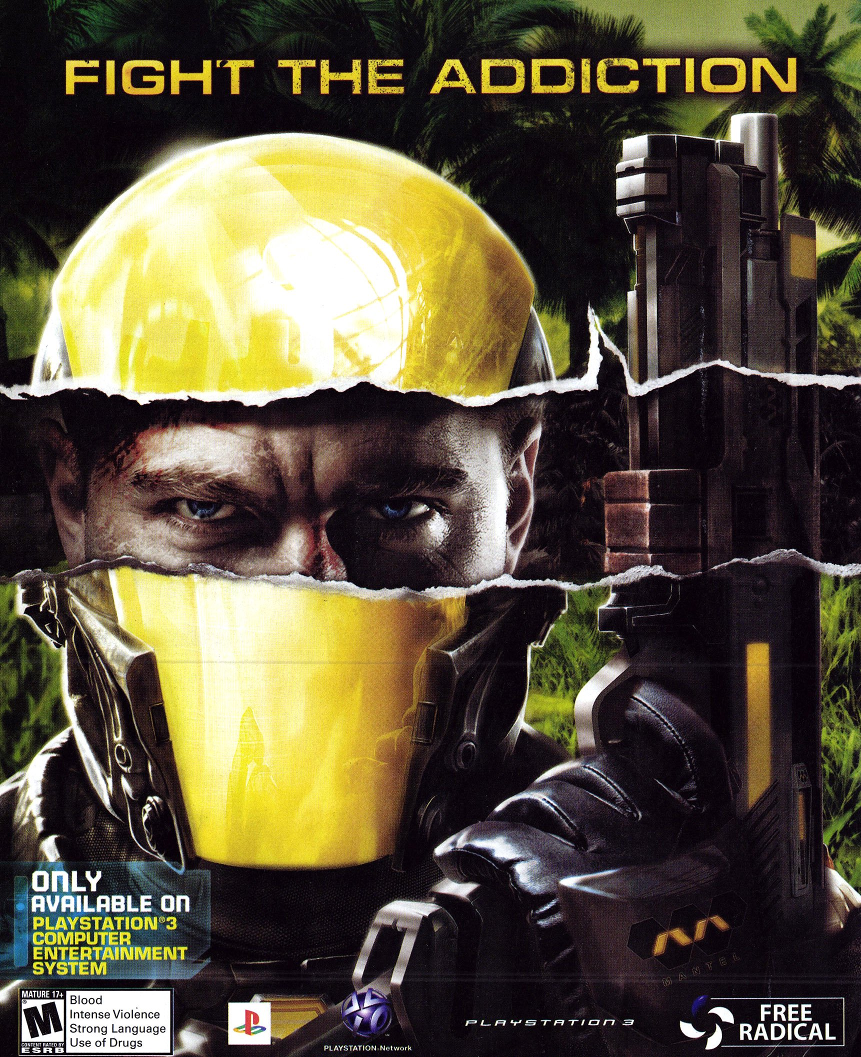
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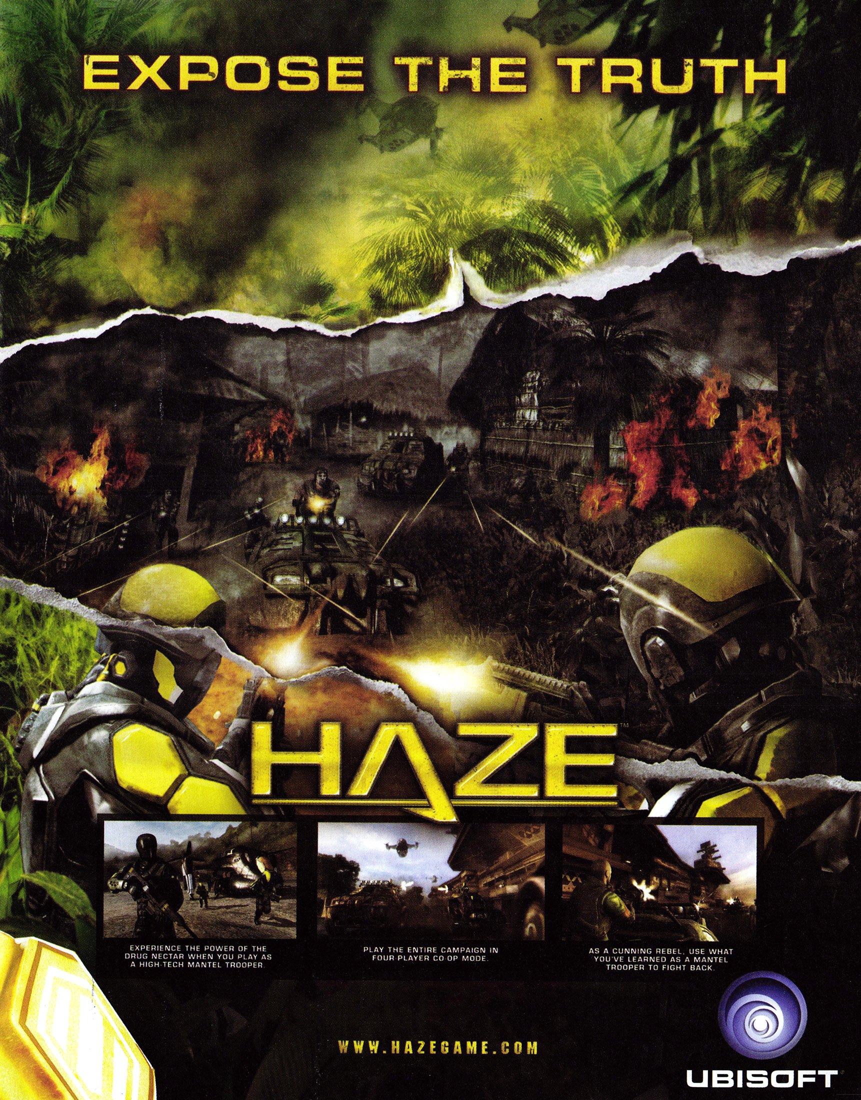

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6 RACING GAMES THAT AREN'T GRAN TURISMO 5

And why you need to play them, even though GT5 might be the best racing experience on PS3

BY ANDREW HAYWARD

fidanza
fidanza
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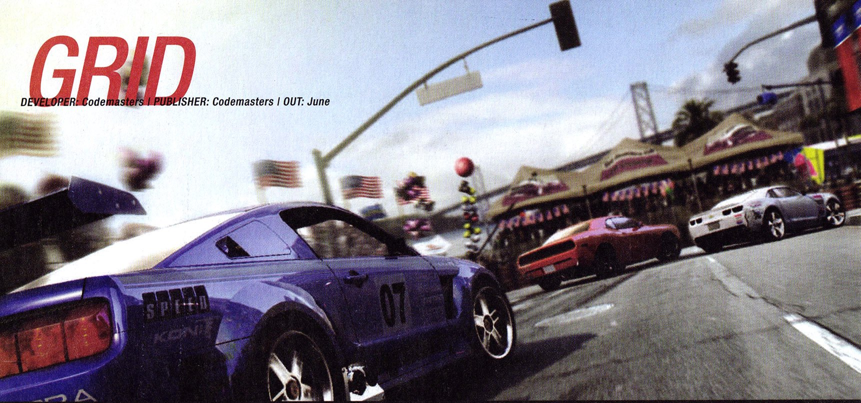
You're excited for *Gran Turismo 5*. We're excited for *Gran Turismo 5* having finally got to play through *Prologue* (check out the review on page 68). As far as we know, everyone is excited for the game—but testimony to the growing quality of the PS3 portfolio it's not the only notable racer on the system. Plus, it's likely many months away from release. So rather than sit on your hands for the foreseeable future, why not warm up with one of these strong options? We've collected six PS3 racers—three currently in stores, three still on the horizon—that offer something a little (or a lot) different than the expected *GT5* experience. Once you've burned through the introductory offering that is *Gran Turismo 5: Prologue*, consider the following titles for your next speed fix.

APEXI
01
brembo fidanza
MOTUL

With a focus on thoroughbred race machines instead of street cars, *GRID* has taken the pole position in the race to fill the gap between *GT5 Prologue* and the full *GT5* release.

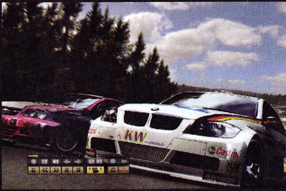
GRID

DEVELOPER: Codemasters | **PUBLISHER:** Codemasters | **OUT:** June



Around the world

While the single-player career ties particular vehicles and locations to each of *GRID's* three regions, the 12-player online races will allow participants to mix and match tracks and cars without limitations. After the gimped online support in *DiRT*, we're just happy to have opponents in the mix!



turbo
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Share the road

Though *DiRT* is a multiplatform release, the Neon Engine powering it (and the forthcoming *GRID)* was developed in conjunction with Sony Computer Entertainment. Talking to UK magazine *Develop*, Codemasters producer Gavin Cheshire explained, "Sony realizes that the only way to make next-gen viable for everyone was to allow everyone to exploit technology."

Of all the titles profiled here, *GRID* appears to be the most closely aligned with *Gran Turismo 5*—but it's the notable differences that may ultimately define this *TOCA Race Driver* franchise extension. While based on realistic racing physics, *GRID* is by no means a dry simulation, instead aiming for a cinematic, exhilarating experience complete with an expansive career mode.

Europe, Japan, and the United States set the stage for *GRID,* with each region presenting a specific brand of racing, encompassing distinct environments and vehicle types. In the States, muscle cars will tear up various city settings, while the jaunt to Japan will highlight tuners drifting around industrial parkways and docks. The European tour looks to focus on you'll-never-afford-one exotics like the Lamborghini Murcielago GTR and Ferrari F430 GT, with more traditional circuit tracks and even a condensed 24-minute version of the 24 Hours of Le Mans event (with full day/night cycle intact).

A comprehensive career mode looks to be a mighty hook for *GRID,* casting drivers as a rookie racer looking to string together wins. Victories lead to bigger and better opportunities, and upon mastering a region, you'll be sent invites to access races in other areas. After establishing your own grand reputation, you'll even be able to start your own team and hire AI drivers, roughly 600 of which are included in the game (and whose skills are based on a combination of personality, ability, and strategic racing approach).

As in *DiRT,* the vehicles can accumulate significant damage during each race, even leaving spare tires and scraps along the track as hazards for the next lap. Not every devastating collision is necessarily permanent, though—Codemasters is currently tweaking a 10-second flashback ability (ala *Full Auto 2: Battlelines)* to give racers a second chance at victory, though it's not yet known how (or if) such a feature will work during the planned 12-player online competitions.

Cinematic action, atmosphere, and flashbacks? Yeah, we're not too sure about those *GT5* comparisons anymore, either.

DiRT

DEVELOPER: Codemasters | PUBLISHER: Codemasters | OUT: Now

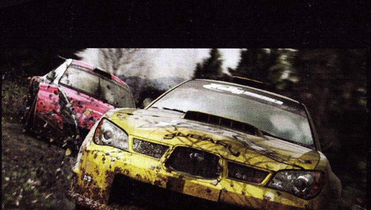
It's too early to tell if rally racing games are finally catching on in North America, but the traditionally niche genre had a very strong 2007. As the speediest of the seven vehicle types in *MotorStorm,* the rally cars were online favorites, and last fall, the arcade stylings of *Sega Rally Revo* prompted some long-dormant pining for "the good ol' days" from Saturn and Dreamcast fans around the world. But neither title did as much for rally gaming in the States as *DiRT,* the latest entry in the critically acclaimed (but oft-overlooked) *Colin McRae Rally* series.

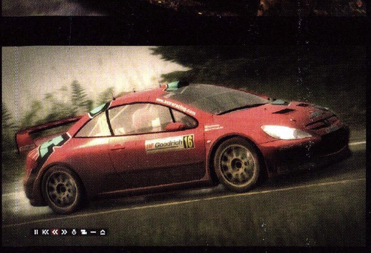
DiRT is the culmination of years of gameplay polishing with informed input from the late rally racing ambassador (McRae was tragically killed in a helicopter crash in September). *DiRT* may not represent a significant deviation from its previous-gen predecessors, but the power of the Neon Engine brought rallying to the PlayStation 3 with so much polish and flair that it could no longer be widely ignored.

From the near photo-realistic visuals to the fantastic user interface (with narration and tips from extreme sports phenom, Travis Pastrana,) *DiRT* forced us to reconsider the confines of asphalt for the winding, muddy paths of the countryside, and cordoned-off dirt tracks. If you thought backseat drivers were annoying, wait until you hear an obsessive *DiRT* player in the passenger seat, detailing the road ahead with pacenotes like only a rally navigator can.

DiRT's appeal isn't limited to the force of its visual presentation—the rock-solid racing physics are put to use in a variety of race types, which keeps the career mode lively and compelling. Rally, crossover, CORR (Championship Off-Road Racing), hill climb, rallicross, and rally raid may seem like largely similar event types, but each takes a distinct approach to the sport, with unique environments, vehicles, and ways to make you wreck your beautiful sponsor-tagged four-wheeler.

An iffy time trial-esque online mode is the only notable knock against this rally champ, but the critical and financial success of the game should ensure an expanded follow-up much sooner than later. We're just curious to see how much *DiRT*-ier it can get.





MOTORSTORM: PACIFIC RIFT

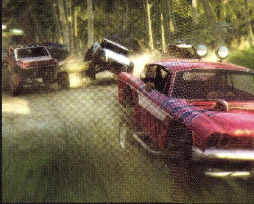
DEVELOPER: *Evolution Studios* | **PUBLISHER:** *SCEA* | **OUT:** *Fall*

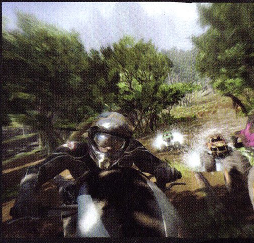
As a marquee new property, *MotorStorm* was bound to spawn a sequel, and SCEA quietly made the project official when it acquired developer Evolution Studios last fall. Following weeks of rumors and supposed behind-closed-doors showings at the Game Developers Conference, the sequel was officially revealed in March with a handful of fresh details and an enticing CG trailer.

Sporting the freshly revealed title *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift,* the highly anticipated sequel will address one of the biggest issues with its strong off-road predecessor via the addition of a four-player split-screen mode (the original lacked even a local two-player mode). Sixteen new racetracks will ship on the disc (double that of the original), with the hectic online races upping the ante with 16-player support. Joining the seven machine types from the first game—bikes, ATVs, racing trucks, rally cars, buggies, big rigs, and mud pluggers—are lumbering, rolling monster trucks, which are sure to create an even wilder multi-vehicle race experience.

Replacing the desert festival setting of the original *MotorStorm* is a Pacific island's lush vegetation, which should provide several unique opportunities for branching paths and a variety of hazards. SCEA promises lava, mud, rivers, and stifling volcanic clouds, and the CG trailer hints at destructible environments, as a monster truck is shown scattering debris on a jungle trail after barreling through a wooden watchtower.

MotorStorm: Pacific Rift should ship months earlier than *Gran Turismo 5,* and aside from the use of rubber wheels and finish lines, the two games couldn't be more different. Though it aims for a realistic representation of the material, *MotorStorm* strikes a fine balance between action and finesse, tossing in ramps and nitrous with its tight controls and visually stunning natural settings. How the island environments will enhance that careful mix remains to be seen, but if it can build upon the sharpest aspects of the original, *Pacific Rift* will be one fierce competitor for our free time this fall.





Island hopping

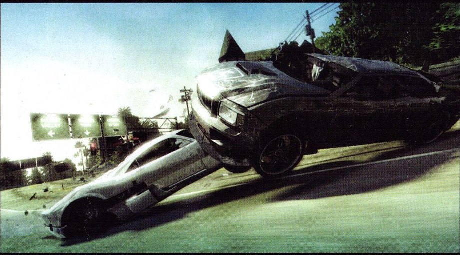
Creative director Alex Ward recently dropped some details on the upcoming downloadable content for *Burnout Paradise* on Criterion's official message board, claiming that additional "islands," connected to Paradise City by in-game bridges, will add new gameplay experiences to the popular racer. Best of all—and yes, this is still an EA title—the DLC is currently slated to be free!

Pole position

MotorStorm has sold more than three million units worldwide to date, making it the top-selling game on the PlayStation 3 platform. The inclusion of the game with hardware bundles certainly contributed to that total, but nevertheless it's an impressive accomplishment for the rookie racing franchise.

BURNOUT PARADISE

DEVELOPER: Criterion | PUBLISHER: EA Games | OUT: Now



Criterion's *Burnout* franchise has always blazed its own trail, from its quiet PlayStation 2 premiere to the more elaborate EA-funded sequels, but change can be a tough proposition for a series approaching its fifth primary iteration. Evolution is usually a slow, drawn-out process, but with *Burnout Paradise,* the franchise transformed from one stellar beast to another, in one next generation leap. Take us down to the Paradise City, indeed.

Paradise ditches the mission-based campaign of its predecessors; for the most part, it also eliminates traditional menus from the experience. Instead, the game pairs the most exciting elements of the franchise—blistering races, violent (intentional) collisions, and a seemingly endless supply of boost—with what many would agree is the best part of the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise: just driving around finding and doing stuff.

Simple enough, right? Indeed, the resulting experience is absolutely effortless—a true testament to the vision and talent of the team at Criterion Games. Want to start a single-player event? Pull up to an intersection and rev the engine a bit. Looking to hop online and race against (or simply cruise alongside) a handful of friends or strangers? Tap the D-pad a couple of times and you're there. Other racers have utilized open worlds with varying degrees of success, but *Burnout Paradise* is the first to feel entirely unrestricted yet completely refined in every way.

More so than any racer in recent memory, *Burnout Paradise* puts the onus on pure, unadulterated fun, eliminating many of the roadblocks (license tests, mission progression) that can limit the accessibility of other racers. You have plenty to unlock and explore if you so desire; *Paradise* is designed to be exactly the game you want it to be. And with free downloadable content in the works, it looks to be exactly the game *we* want to play until *Gran Turismo 5* finally comes out.

WIPEOUT HD

Hands-on Preview

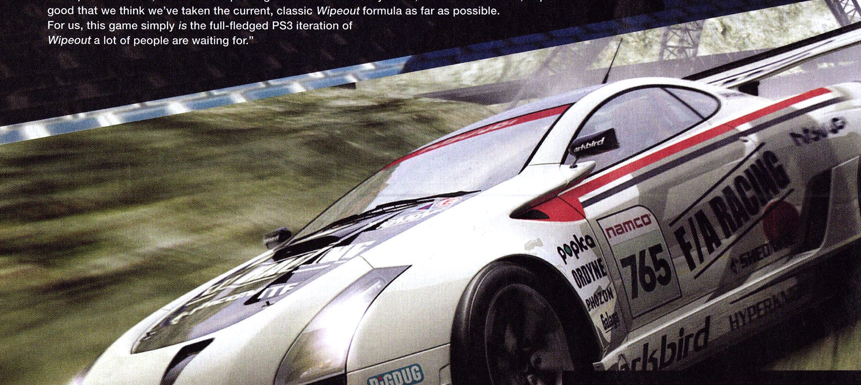
DEVELOPER: Studio Liverpool | **PUBLISHER:** SCEA | **OUT:** June

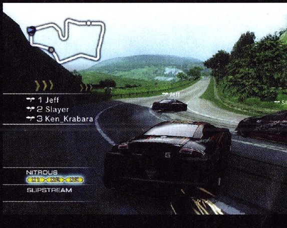
Following a well-received two-title stop on the PSP, SCEA's long-running hovercraft racer is headed back to consoles this summer in the form of *Wipeout HD,* a downloadable game for the PlayStation Network. As the first title in the franchise to run in full HD (1080p) at 60 frames per second, *Wipeout HD* should deliver unprecedented levels of detail and speed—no small task considering the inherent potential for motion sickness within the twisting turns and boost/weapon panels of previous iterations.

At its core, *Wipeout HD* draws upon those two PSP titles—*Wipeout Pure* and *Wipeout Pulse*—culling together eight existing track layouts for the leap into high definition. However, this is no cut-and-paste job: "Absolutely everything else in the game, from the different surfaces of each track to the environments, weapons, and ships has been developed from the ground up specifically for *Wipeout HD,"* explains Clemens Wangerin, development director at Studio Liverpool. Like the PSP games, *Wipeout HD* will be supported with downloadable content packs following its initial release, further positioning it as the title of choice for speed junkies on the PlayStation 3.

Eight-player online races, recently introduced to the series via *Wipeout Pulse,* are sure to be a highlight in *HD,* along with the console debut of the hypnotic Zone mode, in which you must avoid disaster as your ship continuously accelerates around a mesmerizing holographic track.

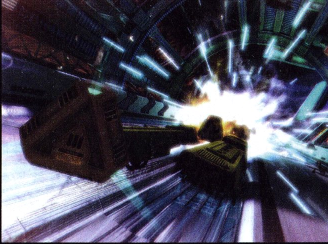
Whether due to its downloadable status or the use of familiar track layouts, *Wipeout HD* has been called a stopgap release before a "true" *Wipeout* sequel comes along, but Wangerin disagrees. "We feel strongly that *Wipeout HD* is absolutely a fully fledged, second-generation PlayStation 3 title and it sits comfortably at the top of the series, in terms of *Wipeout* games for TV-based systems," he claims. "In fact, *Wipeout HD* is so good that we think we've taken the current, classic *Wipeout* formula as far as possible. For us, this game simply *is* the full-fledged PS3 iteration of *Wipeout* a lot of people are waiting for."





Training wheels

Novices who struggle with controlling *Wipeout HD's* sleek hovercrafts can turn to the brand-new Pilot Assist feature, which offers a helping hand for those not accustomed to driving without wheels. According to Wangerin, the feature was inspired by a similar one used in F1 racing titles developed by Studio Liverpool in the past.



RIDGE RACER 7

DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai | PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai | OUT: Now

When it launched alongside the PlayStation 3 in November 2006, *Ridge Racer 7* took a fair amount of flak for playing it safe—and as a revised and expanded take on Xbox 360 launch title *Ridge Racer 6,* such criticisms were certainly valid.

But that's been the modus operandi of the long-running franchise since its arcade debut in 1993, and while the first and latest iterations can hardly be compared side-by-side, one thing is overwhelming clear: *Ridge Racer* found its niche long ago and has made little attempt to significantly diverge from its successful template.

Where *Gran Turismo* continues to push toward unflinching realism, *Ridge Racer* has become shinier and more artificial over the years. *Ridge Racer 7* is fast, loose, sleek, and at least a little bit ridiculous—our four-door sedans may have nothing on the speedsters in the game, but we're pretty sure cars aren't meant to take turns while *completely sideways* (and somehow accumulate nitrous in the process).

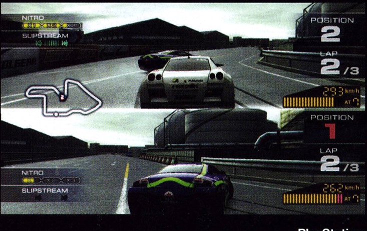
Unlicensed supercars bear extravagant names like Terrazi Starnose and Gnade Magnifico without a wink and a smile, refusing to take a scratch when they bounce off the guardrails after some wickedly misjudged turn. Like *Gran Turismo,* you'll often need to be nearly perfect to win many races, but with a three-part boost meter and a slipstream speed bonus, it's much easier to regain lost ground after a spectacular collision.

While the game makes a strong push toward a genuine campaign with its Ridge State Grand Prix mode, *Ridge Racer 7* is still primarily a title concerned with zipping around loops in reasonably common locales, such as a darkened highway or a European city. And though it now seems a bit primitive in the wake of *Burnout Paradise's* masterful online integration, the network rankings and associated news ticker add an extra layer to *RR7's* enjoyable online race experience.

Ridge Racer 7 may not scream next-gen like other recent racers (despite solid visuals and an awesome 5.1 audio mix), but it's nice to see this familiar face whenever a PlayStation launches. It's comfort food—for racing fans.

Riding shotgun

Every PlayStation has launched with a *Ridge Racer* game in tow. The original *Ridge Racer* shipped alongside the PlayStation in 1995, with *Ridge Racer 5* appearing with the PlayStation 2 in 2000. A new *Ridge Racer* hit with the PSP in 2005, and *Ridge Racer 7* followed a year later at the PlayStation 3 launch. A *Ridge Racer* on the console launch line-up list is almost considered a good luck charm for that platform's future success.



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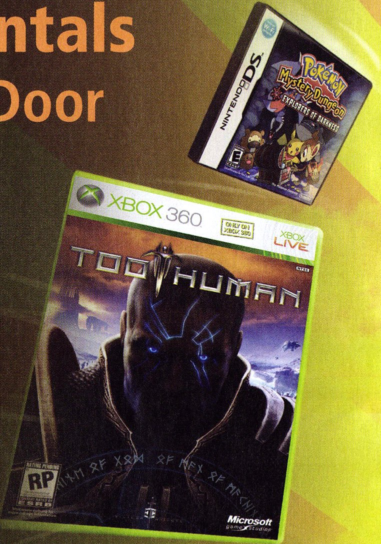
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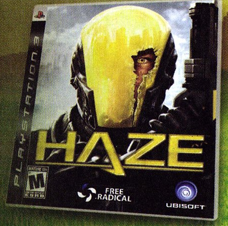
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GAME BOY ADVANCE

shaun white

White made it clear that he didn't want players to simply assume his role. Instead, he'll mentor boarders who aspire to reach his heigh

FLYING HIGH

with The Flying Tomato in Shaun White Snowboarding

By Nadia Oxford

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: Q4

GENRE: Action Sports

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft

DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal

"Look, but don't touch" has long been the premise of console snowboarding games. Steadily improving technology encouraged you to go faster and pull off more complex stunts, but the barrier between the boarder and the environment remained rigid.

Ubisoft and Olympic gold medal snowboarder Shaun White are collaborating on a fresh design intended to take you away from straight runs down plastic mountains, and immerse you in a world that captures the most important aspects of snowboarding—community, interactivity, and adaptation. Survive a treacherous slide down a craggy peak and glide seamlessly below the tree line, off into the wilderness of the backcountry. Eventually you'll arrive in the park with the option to goof off on the half-pipes. If you pass by something cool on your journey, get off your board and take a look. Chances are you'll find a secret run in an abandoned mine settlement, or you can take the opportunity to knock over a rotted tree to form a makeshift ramp. You can call out to your friends to share your finds, or you can keep them to yourself; it's up to you. *Shaun White Snowboarding* emphasizes that there's far more to the snowboarding culture than the single-stance stereotype normally embraced by the media.

ough some of the lessons he bestows go beyond the typical teacher/pupil relationship.

The foolhardy even have the option to start an avalanche...

Interview with Shaun White

PTOM: So what's your background with games? Are you into the old school titles?

White: My very first game for the Nintendo was *Double Dragon.*

PTOM: What sort of challenges have you faced while developing *Shaun White Snowboarding?*

White: We've been having some challenges with the script because a lot of the guys from Ubisoft are from France, so some of the humor doesn't really cross over. Stuff that's funny here may not be funny over there, stuff like that. I'm trying to work on a script that's funny for both sides because I don't want the game to have typical snowboard-related jokes. I want the script to have stuff that I would say to my friends. I think it's working out great so far. As long as I can bring humor and my music style into the game, I think it's going to be awesome.

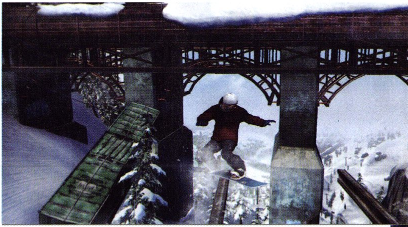
Another big challenge is explaining what the wind's like when I'm going down, or what a jump really looks like. Ubisoft's office is in Montreal, so sometimes those guys are actually able to go to the mountains and get into it, which helps.

PTOM: Aside from the snowboarding aspect, did any one game inspire you to develop your own?

White: Well...there was *Duck Hunt,* that was pretty freaky. The technology now is so crazy with the PlayStation 3 and all that stuff. You can really capture emotions now...if something funny happens, you laugh along or whatever. That's really what I'm trying to capture.

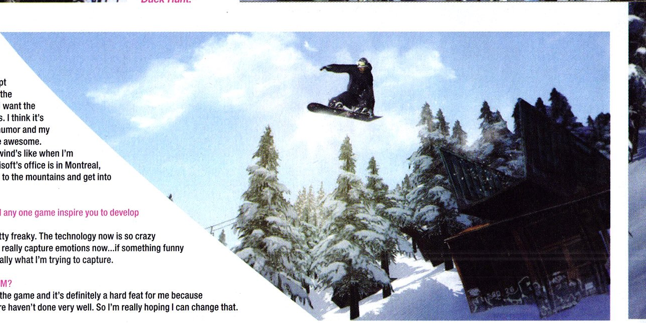
PTOM: Any final message for the readers of PTOM?

White: Well, we've been working pretty hard on the game and it's definitely a hard feat for me because all the snowboarding games that came out before haven't done very well. So I'm really hoping I can change that.



Every object in the environment is potentially interactive. The ride and trick possibilities are only limited by your own imagination and creativity.

"Dude, it's cold out here! Let's go back inside and play more *Duck Hunt.*"



"You can jump from the helicopter too," Lemarche laughs, "but you might not survive."

It's not often that snow and sand share the same foundation, but *Shaun White Snowboarding* will, surprisingly, employ the *Assassin's Creed* engine. While you won't be able to slide down the mountain brandishing a knife, Producer Louis Lamarche says some of the abilities Altair exhibited will help build the deep environment Ubisoft is developing. "In *Assassin's Creed,* you could get up high, look all around and get a feeling for your surroundings. That's what we want in *Shaun White Snowboarding."*

DEEP SNOW

The design team aims to take the depth of gameplay options to unprecedented levels for a snowboarding game. Physics and gravity apply to every situation; if you put down your board on a hill, it'll try to escape from you all on its own. Your avatar's riding stance changes depending on the snow conditions. And whether or not you're playing with friends or offline, you'll rarely be alone. Even NPCs will recognize your talent as you continue to play, improve, and earn their respect. *Shaun White Snowboarding* considers every aspect of what bonds boarders together.

That includes time on the ski lift. When you reach the bottom of the park area, you can ride back up to the top, chatting with your friends during the trip. Why include such a seemingly mundane feature in the game? "You get to see the mountain from another angle," Lamarche explains. "You might see things you missed the first time down."

If you do see something interesting, you can jump off the lift and examine it. You can also opt to skip the ride altogether and choose a drop point. A helicopter will take you above the tree line if you choose to brave the mountain summit. "You can jump from the helicopter too," Lemarche laughs, "but you might not survive."

ADAPT AND CHANGE

Though *Shaun White Snowboarding* carries the sense of community found in MMORPGs, the level-based separation of novices and the experienced is absent. Each of the four mountain environments is unlocked from the start, meaning someone who picks up the game a month after his friends can play alongside them. The avatar of a newbie will still exhibit some inexperience and seem a little unsure next to the avatar of a more experienced player. With practice (and some mentoring), he'll find his legs, putting the game's customization options far beyond wardrobe selection. Your riding style changes depending on whether you favor trying to survive the mountain summits or goofing off in the park.

MORE THAN A COLD FEELING

"We really wanted to capture the emotion behind snowboarding," says Scott Mitchell, the project's art director. The game addresses the emotions that vary wildly in the sport, whether it's the solitude of standing on a mountain peak with the wind ripping through your hood or the party atmosphere of the park (featuring Shaun White's preference for classic rock—though the soundtrack will be customizable). The foolhardy even have the option to start an avalanche, which preludes with the heart-stopping crack that no boarder or skier ever wants to hear. Once initiated, you can try to outrace the rush, but it's not easy. The flow conforms to the terrain, swimming into runs and cracks, leaving you safe pockets—if you're lucky, and if you can handle your footing, which becomes more chaotic as the barrage closes in.

Shaun White 411

Born in 1986, Shaun White is an Olympic snowboarder, though he's an accomplished skateboarder as well. The California native's distinctive red hair has earned him the oft-used nickname "The Flying Tomato." White has been snowboarding since he was fourteen, and he has earned a medal in the Winter X Games every year since 2002. In 2006, he won an Olympic gold medal for the United States in the men's half-pipe event.

SHAUN THE MENTOR

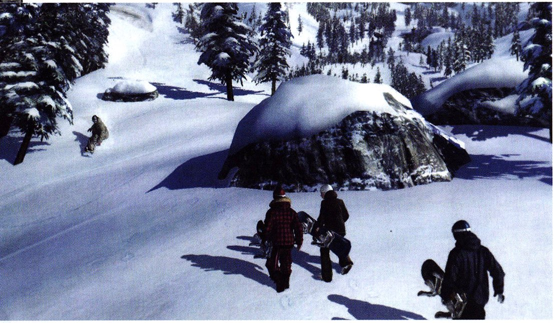
Though it would have been simple to slap Shaun White's name on a snowboarding game for an easy sale, White's involvement in the project goes far beyond his image rights and endorsement. He's deep into the game's creative direction, which is comforting considering his love for both snowboarding and gaming.

"He's really involved with the production," says Mitchell. "He's not afraid to offer suggestions and criticism, and that's refreshing."

To begin with, White made it clear that he didn't want players to simply assume his role. Instead, he'll mentor boarders who aspire to reach his heights, though some of the lessons he bestows go beyond the typical teacher/pupil relationship. White's laid-back sense of humor permeates many features within the game environment, and some of the requests he makes reflect that.

"At the start of the game, Shaun will give your character three items he's known for," says Lemarche. What are those items and what are their purposes? "That's a surprise."

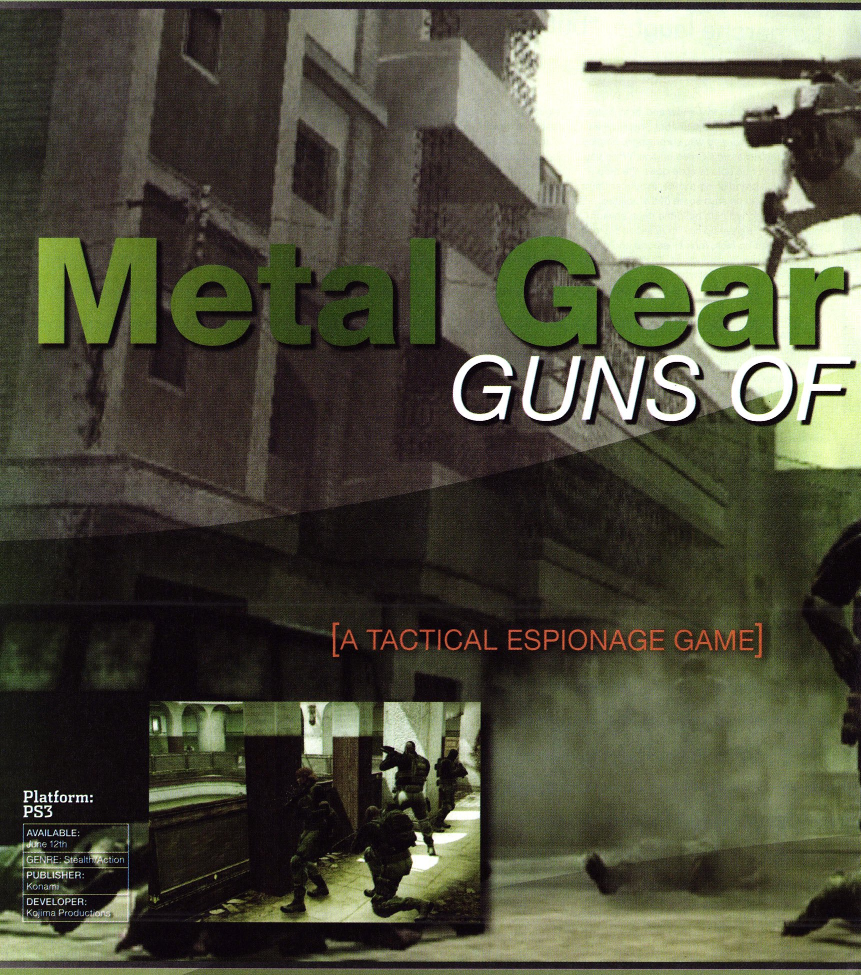
White realizes that most snowboarding games have been lacking in vital atmosphere, and he's determined to change that with his game. "We're putting a lot of time and effort into this game. We put you in the place of a snowboarder. We show you what it feels like to ride, to be in the air, and land on top of your head."



***Shaun White Snowboarding* isn't just an action sports title; the persistent mountain environment and social interaction aspects impart a decidedly MMORPG-like element to the game.**

Metal Gear
GUNS OF

[A TACTICAL ESPIONAGE GAME]



Platform:
PS3

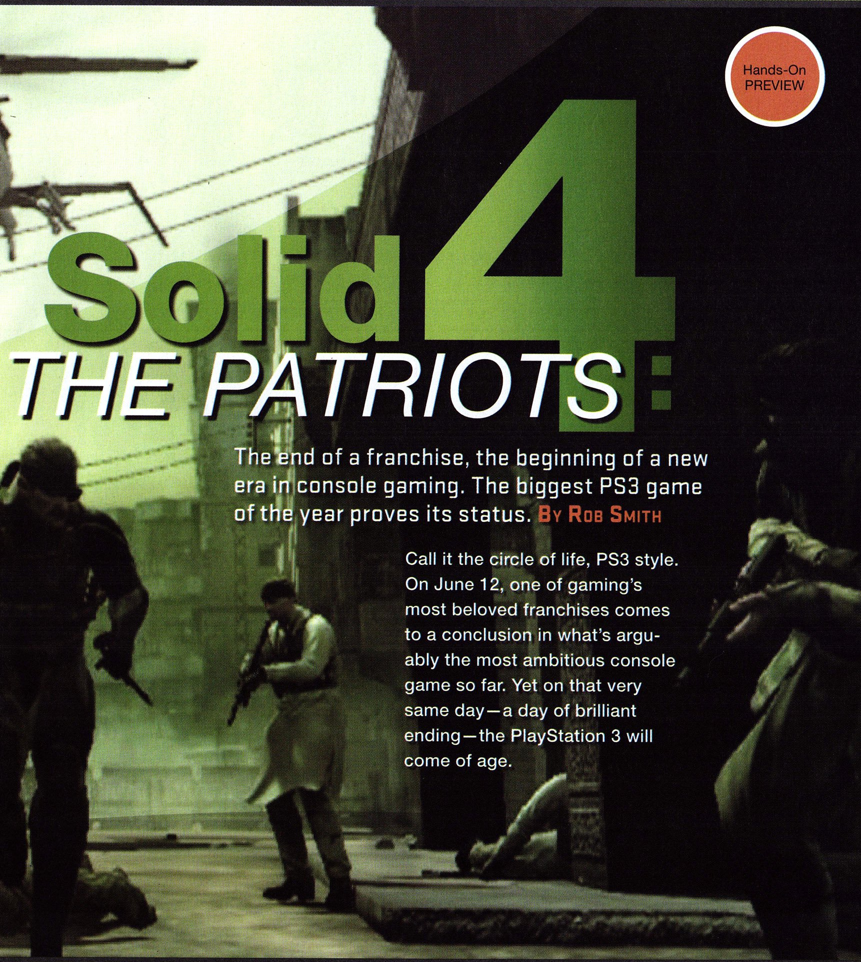
AVAILABLE:
June 12th

GENRE: Stealth/Action

PUBLISHER:
Konami

DEVELOPER:
Kojima Productions

Hands-On
PREVIEW

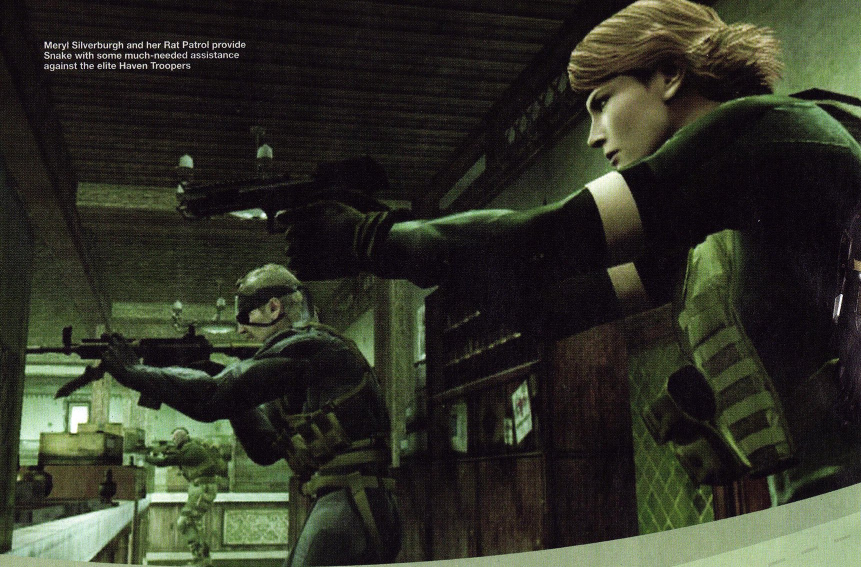


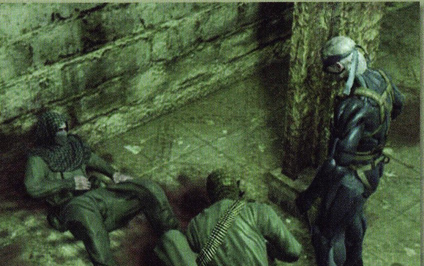
Solid 4
THE PATRIOTS:

The end of a franchise, the beginning of a new era in console gaming. The biggest PS3 game of the year proves its status.

By Rob Smith

Call it the circle of life, PS3 style. On June 12, one of gaming's most beloved franchises comes to a conclusion in what's arguably the most ambitious console game so far. Yet on that very same day—a day of brilliant ending—the PlayStation 3 will come of age.


Meryl Silverburgh and her Rat Patrol provide Snake with some much-needed assistance against the elite Haven Troopers


War in *MGS4* is dirty, and the rights and wrongs, good guys and bad guys ambiguous.

M*etal Gear Solid 4* isn't just another big game—it's importance far outpaces the size of its massive fanbase. Indeed, *MGS4* has become intimately connected with the PS3 itself. Through platform demonstrations in the battle for next-gen mindshare, *MGS4* has become the poster child for PS3 potential. But with such high hopes from so many parties, could one game really live up to all the lofty expectations?

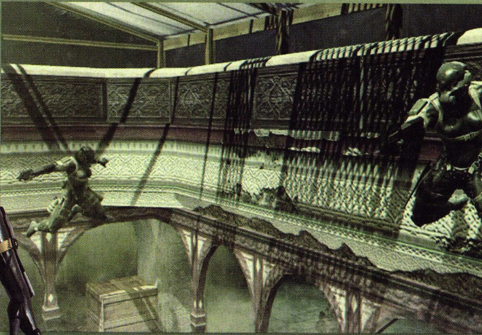
The answer, simply put, is yes. We know because we got to play through it all, from glorious start to thrilling finish, in three gaming-packed days at Konami's Super Campus in Nasu, Japan. While most of the experience is being kept under wraps so as not to spoil the many varied surprises, we've got enough exhilarating details in the next few pages to give you a taste of what to expect when this bona fide system seller ships in June.

WELCOME TO THE TRUE NEXT GENERATION

War is raging. The jagged edges of bombed-out buildings reveal tattered wall coverings and shattered tile inside. Dust spills out behind troop carriers and trucks. High on a building roof, a sniper and his spotter lie in wait, ready to pick away at the opposing forces. The crack of a rifle pierces the ear. Below, engines hum and feet stamp on the desert ground.

The very opening cut scene demonstrates a high-end, modern cinematic style that prevails to the end. The attention to visual detail in every character, environment, and effect is mesmerizing—even the desert fatigues are astoundingly realistic. This Middle Eastern environment teems with realistic details that could have been culled from CNN's coverage of the war in Iraq.

Yet despite the battle surrounding you, you're quickly reminded that *Metal Gear* is a sneak-and-strike game. In your

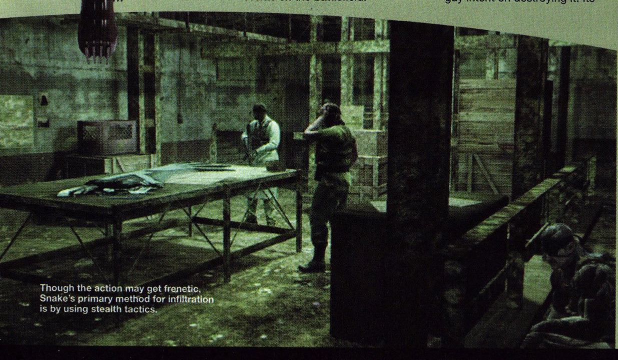


Elite female Haven Troopers, known as "frogs" prove a stern challenge for Snake and Rat Patrol.

first encounter, the only outcome to wandering into the battle with guns blazing is an embarrassingly fast restart. Better to sneak past a tank using your Octocamo suit to blend into any surroundings with the swift anonymity of the most elusive chameleon. The subtle visual effect is impressive, but more spectacular is that the game will modify your behavior. After all, if you fail this first mission (and don't be embarrassed, you probably will), the opportunity to play through again is actually a blessing. Second time, third time, maybe fourth time and beyond you'll witness a unique reaction to your movements, and you will uncover more details about the events on the battlefield.

Right from the outset you will question the very fundamental issue of who, exactly, are the bad guys. PMC (Private Military Company) soldiers are tussling with insurgent groups. One option: leave them to it so you can sneak by unnoticed to your objective. Another is to aid one side, but only with the goal of making it to your objective (though in the early going your limited arsenal makes it tough to face off effectively against these overwhelming forces). It all helps set up the overriding goal of tracking down perpetual villain Liquid Ocelot. At its heart, *MGS4* is a simple story about saving the world from the one main bad guy intent on destroying it. Its weaving, winding exposition explains Snake's Werner Syndrome symptoms (the accelerated aging that initially explains his graying look) as well as the various other unanswered questions from the past games.

Making progress toward these inspiring goals involves facing danger at every turn. While lying prone, an alert circle indicates the location of potential peril. During our hands-on time, enemies proved to be very alert to their environment and our impact on it. A casual enemy might pass you by while you're blending into the floor—but if a group is alert and searching for you, then sitting still or playing dead won't cut it. (Oddly, lying flat, not moving, trying not to even breathe in a game, has never been so compelling!) At the time of our playtest, the enemy AI was still being tweaked for the final release, but we've already witnessed some changes in how foes react; in an earlier version, squads were more easily fooled by playing possum than during this session, so we're curious how that will be balanced for the final release. Our progress through enemy-infested terrain was certainly eased when we got access to the silenced tranquilizer gun that allowed for a more anonymous takedown of patrols. Without it, patience and no small amount of good fortune was needed to remain in the shadows and away from potentially deadly alerts.



Though the action may get frenetic, Snake's primary method for infiltration is by using stealth tactics.

History Remembered

At the beginning of missions, cut scenes spell out the complex evolution of the entire *Metal Gear*-series. But watch carefully; as characters talk and reference other stars of this universe, you may see an X or L1 button icon quickly flash on the screen. Hit the right button while it's highlighted and you'll be treated to a very brief context flashback. Basically, the system uses images and moments from the past *Metal Gear* games to help visually rekindle your own memories of the who, what, where, and why. Even for series veterans, this clever device ensures you'll keep your hands on the controller during each and every cut scene!

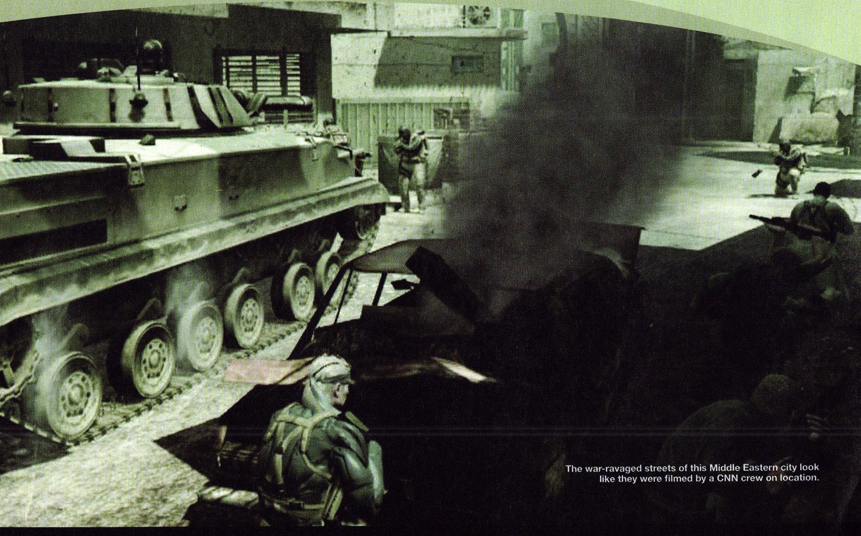
As is the tradition in this series, you're not totally alone. Otacon will provide you with a steady stream of information on the dangers; he also supplies the Metal Gear Mk. II, your robotic sidekick that can be used to scout around and be your eyes and ears when a situation requires a delicate, patient touch. The Mk. II can also be controlled during cut scenes with Otacon (Doctor Hal Emmerich, your off-site support): Move it around the enclosed area to watch the various digital actors unveil more plot details as your mission statistics (gameplay time, kills, uses of the box, and many others) scroll across the middle of the screen.

NAME'S DREBIN

The sneak-'em-up gameplay remains the core experience—but when the job requires it, the action intensifies with occasionally deliberate, occasionally chaotic firefights. Again, don't just expect to tear through waves of enemies; instant headshots were almost a requirement in order to survive multiple confrontations. During these scenarios, we definitely struggled a bit with the control scheme, especially when it came to targeting enemies (we immediately turned off auto-aim and later increased the control sensitivity). The challenge was offset by the huge fun of blasting away at tanks (as well as anyone standing close enough to the blast radius) with static mortar emplacements. That kind of revelation proved it always pays to roam and investigate every level.

Aiding your battlefield excursions from the military hardware angle is Drebin, a slick weapons dealer. Mission completions earn you Drebin Points that can then be cashed in for new weapons and ammo, along with attachments and upgrades to your preferred guns. Even mid-battle you can punch into Drebin's store to stock up on ammo or maybe find a weapon better suited to your particular situation through a quick access of the weapons menu (it's a slick and effective, if not entirely realistic, method of arming yourself for the challenge ahead). Drebin will also automatically buy any extras you find of weapons you already own, and he pays immediately, providing more Drebin Points, giving you all the encouragement you need to mop up the items dropped by characters after each encounter. He can also remove the ID tagging system on weapons that previously meant that Snake couldn't just scavenge the battlefield for new firepower.

Drebin appears out of left field in his APC, and brings with him a distinctive style and surprisingly indepth knowledge of the Beauty and the Beast unit of enemies that Snake will face, and helps flesh out the background story. He's also accompanied by an odd-looking, diaper-wearing


The war-ravaged streets of this Middle Eastern city look like they were filmed by a CNN crew on location.

Of course, sneak tactics aren't the only course of action. Sometimes, you just need to bring the heavy artillery.

monkey sidekick who has a Narc Cola addiction (fun fact: both Pepsi and Coke declined the chance to be the featured cola of choice, as did Red Bull). Again, it's an additional visual flair that enhances the intriguing experience of uncovering all the final details about the *Metal Gear* universe.

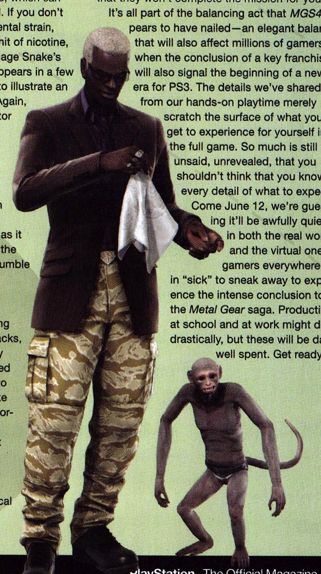
BATTLE FATIGUE

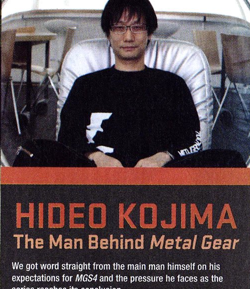
Waging a one-man war would tire out anyone, and Snake is no exception. His mental state is illustrated by the Psyche Gauge, which can affect his performance in the field. If you don't have any pick-ups to ease the mental strain, you can always resort to a quick hit of nicotine, but smoking cigarettes does damage Snake's health. The Psyche Gauge also appears in a few lighthearted cut scene moments to illustrate an ego getting squeezed or fluffed. Again, it's another piece of data to monitor on the battlefield, and managing it effectively helps ensure you're working effectively.

Of course, you'll be managing your own personal fatigue as you strive to get through each mission objective with your chosen style. Using the Snake Eye is essential, as it not only delivers data on items in the world that you might otherwise stumble past unawares, but also provides an incredibly valuable night vision capability (though it is limited by battery life, preventing it from being permanently equipped). Ration packs, ammo, and other items litter many locations, but can also be obscured in tall grass or rubble. It's crucial to thoroughly scan each area to make sure you didn't miss anything important before continuing on.

Excited yet? Then consider that we've only unveiled details of the very first Middle East mission. Watching characters move with astonishing realism, execute tactical maneuvers against your position, and work together as military personnel should, is simply stunning. Returning series star Meryl Silverburgh and her nanomachine-powered Rat Patrol provide squad-like support, but with the added spectacle of each team member exhibiting their own distinct personality. It's actually quite shocking to see characters with such finely crafted personas. They might be a bunch of badasses, but you genuinely care about each and every member of the Rat Patrol. Good thing, because their help is critical—but so well paced that they won't complete the mission for you.

It's all part of the balancing act that *MGS4* appears to have nailed—an elegant balance that will also affect millions of gamers when the conclusion of a key franchise will also signal the beginning of a new era for PS3. The details we've shared from our hands-on playtime merely scratch the surface of what you'll get to experience for yourself in the full game. So much is still unsaid, unrevealed, that you shouldn't think that you know every detail of what to expect. Come June 12, we're guessing it'll be awfully quiet in both the real world and the virtual one, as gamers everywhere call in "sick" to sneak away to experience the intense conclusion to the *Metal Gear* saga. Productivity at school and at work might drop drastically, but these will be days well spent. Get ready.





HIDEO KOJIMA

The Man Behind *Metal Gear*

We got word straight from the main man himself on his expectations for *MGS4* and the pressure he faces as the series reaches its conclusion.

PTOM: This is not just another anticipated game for the huge *Metal Gear* audience; it's also anticipated as *the* biggest game to hit the PlayStation 3. Does that generate any extra sense of pressure?

KOJIMA: Yes, every time I release a title I have the pressure and of course this time is special because the *Metal Gear* saga will come to an end. Currently, especially in Japan and all over the world, you see Wii, DS and mobile phone making smash hits and making mobile games easy to pick up. And this *Metal Gear* is a big title, as you know, so we are currently kind of the underdogs. In this era *Metal Gear* is for the core gamers, for the traditional gamers who love these kinds of games. At the same time everyone will be looking to see if the traditional core games gamer will come to this game, meaning if *Metal Gear* fails that would probably discourage other developers who are creating traditional core games. I would like *Metal Gear* to succeed because I would like to give courage to all the game creators who want to create the real, real games we had in the past.

PTOM: Is there anything that you've seen on PS3 where you've said "these are some of the benchmarks that we need to pass"?

KOJIMA: There's not just exclusive PS3 titles out there, so you know, like *Assassin's Creed*, *Call of Duty 4*, *Bioshock*, or *The Darkness* (which had great demons, a great opening), so I've been telling the staff that they don't need to look at the Japanese titles, look at the other titles.

Assassin's Creed especially, I thought it was brilliant because it really fulfilled the basic concept that *MGS4* had at the beginning: how you could go anywhere in the environment and also you could climb anywhere, run anywhere. At the beginning of the concept *Metal Gear Solid 4* had motion-blending, meaning if you push down a direction things go automatically and seamlessly. If a bullet comes you don't have to manually dodge, but the motion dodges and happens naturally. We kind of gave up on this because it was just too difficult, but when *Assassin's Creed* came out, we saw that they accomplished what we were really aiming for at first. I have to tell you that my staff and I were really low for the next three days after it came out.

A full version of this interview is included in *Metal Gear Solid: The Complete Guide*, currently on sale at all good magazine outlets.

METAL GEAR SOLID
THE COMPLETE GUIDE

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RATINGS

★★★★★ **EXCEPTIONAL**
An excellent game that takes its genre to new heights.

★★★★ **GREAT**
Not flawless, but a truly great game and among the best in its genre.

★★★ **OKAY**
An overall positive experience for fans of the genre or subject matter.

★★ **POOR**
Suffers from several major flaws that really damage the experience.

★ **AWFUL**
Not worth your time or money.

GAME of the month Gran Turismo 5 Prologue p 68

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

Peek into PTOM's garage and see what we're driving, and what we'd drive if we won the lottery.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

CURRENT CAR: **'06 Infiniti G35 Coupe**
Despite incessant electrical problems, Rob's "I love my psycho girlfriend"-passion for his ride remains unabated.
DREAM CAR: **'63 Jaguar E-Type**
Apparently, Rob's dream is to one day trade in his electrical issues for oil leaks.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *GTA IV, MLB 08: The Show (PSP/PS2)*

NOW PLAYING: Air miles gatherer; *MLB 08: The Show (PSP)*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

CURRENT CAR: **'05 Toyota Camry (silver)**
Teresa currently endures unrelenting abuse for her eminently sensible choice in cars.
DREAM CAR: **'05 Toyota Camry (dark blue)**
By dreaming of owning the *exact same car* in a different color, Teresa guarantees that said abuse will continue through posterity.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Puzzle Guzzle, Buzz! Junior Robo Jam, Rocketmen*

NOW PLAYING: All the PSN demos (yes, all of them!), *flOw, Crisis Core*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

CURRENT CAR: **'86 Ford Ranger**
Ken affectionately refers to his ride as...er, "Biohazard." Which explains why we never ask Ken to drive us to lunch.
DREAM CAR: **'08 Nissan 350Z**
With a wistful look in his eyes, Ken is often heard muttering, "Just a Z...any Z will do."

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: His options—for punishing editors who miss deadlines.

NOW PLAYING: Indoor soccer—unlike the rest of us, Ken actually gets exercise.

GARY STEINMAN
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

CURRENT CAR: **'07 Audi A3**
Gary insists it's just A3 talk, but Teresa feels uncomfortable when he keeps repeating, "luxury and speed in a stealthy package."
DREAM CAR: **'08 Audi RS4**
As if! Girly-man can't even drive a stick!

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Iron Man, Wild ARMs XF, R&C: Size Matters*

NOW PLAYING: *Patapon*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

CURRENT CAR: **'08 Volkswagen GTI**
The GTI helped Roger make friends with his fast, or as his wife opines, "too fast."
DREAM CAR: **'08 Aston Martin V8 Vantage**
Roger claims the AM V8 is the Victoria's Secret catalog of cars. Um...*catalog?!*

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue, Viking: Battle for Asgard*

NOW PLAYING: *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue*

JONATHAN MILLER
EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTOR

CURRENT CAR: **'98 Honda Civic**
Jonathan describes his Civic as sexy with decent fuel economy. He's half right.
DREAM CAR: **'08 Ferrari F430 Spider**
Jon, the human thesaurus, says the F430 also happens to be...sexy.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *UEFA Euro 2008, NBA Ballers: Chosen One*

NOW PLAYING: *Rainbow Six Vegas 2, CoD 4*

Retro View

The big games we were playing this month in PlayStation history.

ONE YEAR AGO...

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion (PS3)
(9.0 out of 10)

Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords (PSP)
(8.5 out of 10)

Test Drive Unlimited (PSP)
(8.5 out of 10)

FIVE YEARS AGO...

Midnight Club II (PS2)
(10 out of 10)

.hack//MUTATION (PS2)
(8 out of 10)

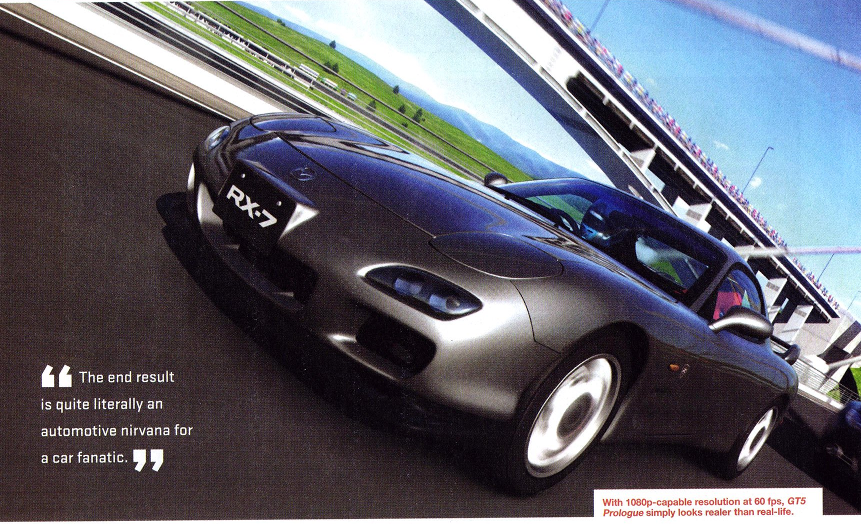
Indycar Series (PS2)
(8 out of 10)

10 YEARS AGO...

Tekken 3 (PS1)
(5 stars)

Einhander (PS1)
(4.5 stars)

Mega Man Legends (PS1)
(4 stars)



“The end result is quite literally an automotive nirvana for a car fanatic.”

With 1080p-capable resolution at 60 fps, *GT5 Prologue* simply looks realer than real-life.

PS3 | R

Gran Turismo 5 Prologue

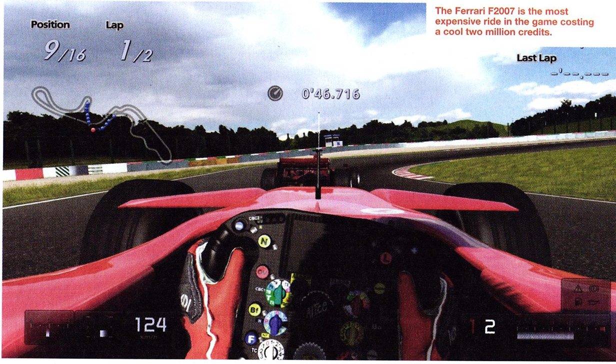
GT5 Prologue's DualShock support is excellent. It wouldn't surprise us if you could feel the rumble of this Morrison Corvette's engine.

Prologue to greatness? Or The Real Driving Imitator?

PS3 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital

When it comes to driving games, the *Gran Turismo*-series is the king of the road. A bona fide *GT* installment is the top-of-the-line model with the high output V8 and sport-tuned suspension that comes loaded with features and options. Its mammoth selection of cars and tracks is like an unrelenting surge of horsepower in a car—prod the accelerator some more and it reveals even more layers of performance. Sometimes, it seems inconceivable that such a metaphorical machine of a game exists. The abundance of rides and driving experiences, the attention to detail, the dedication to sweating the details—the end result is quite literally an automotive nirvana for a car fanatic.

But the game we're looking at today isn't the full spec uber-ride. *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue* is more akin to the entry-level model with the four-cylinder engine, all-season tires, and cloth interior. It doesn't have the navigation system with premium stereo or heated seats, but it still handles pretty sweet and the wife won't balk at the fuel economy. It's not the ride you really want, the one you dream of, but for about one-third the price, maybe it's a better option for the real world—at least until next year. So grab the keys and let's take 'er for a spin.

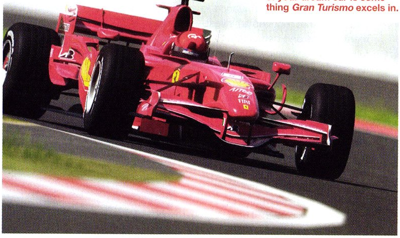


The Ferrari F2007 is the most expensive ride in the game costing a cool two million credits.

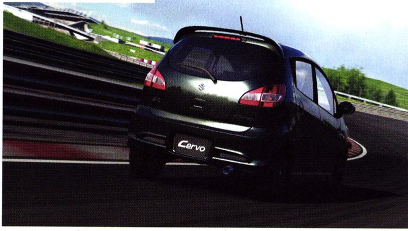
The first thing to check out when starting up a new *Gran Turismo* game is the dealer showroom. There are a total of 71 cars in the game (see Car List sidebar)—down *just* a tad from the 700-plus cars in *GT4*—but remember, this isn't a full-blown *GT* entry. Most of the cars can be purchased if you earn enough credits by participating in, and preferably, winning races, but there are a few that must be earned by clearing all the events for a particular racing class. You begin with 35,000 credits with which to purchase your first slice of vehicular heaven to embark on your racing career. If you're smart, you'll check out the permitted car requirements in the entry-level Class C events before you make a purchase, but if you're like me, you'll blow your money on a VW GTI because it's just freakin' cool to see your real-life ride in the game. Oh well, it's only credits.

After selecting your ride, it's time to hit the track. *GT5 Prologue* comes equipped with three primary play modes: Arcade, 2P Battle, and Events. Arcade mode lets you jump in and start having fun right away with the option of a Single Race, Time Trial, or an intriguing Drift Trial. Since the focus isn't on simulation, the races are shorter and the rides more forgiving. 2P Battle is the two-player split-screen mode that let's you face-off arcade-style with a friend. It's a great way to familiarize yourself with the tracks and your vehicle's capabilities.

Speaking of tracks, there are six distinct ones in *GT5 Prologue:* High Speed Ring, Daytona International Speedway, Fuji Speedway, Eiger Nordwand, Suzuka Circuit, and a London street course. There are



Putting you behind the wheel of your dream car is something *Gran Turismo* excels in.



And then, you wake up in the morning next to this...

The BMW Concept 1 Series tii can only be acquired with skill, not money.

reverse or alternate versions of each course making for a total of twelve tracks for you to master. Again, this is piddling in comparison to a full *GT* game *(GT4* boasted 50-plus tracks), but I digress. Each of the tracks offers a unique challenge and you'll need to adjust your driving style and strategy to suit the track and the car your manning. The benefit of the limited track selection is that you *will* get to know these tracks, and you'll need to know them well if you intend to earn a gold ranking in every event.

The Events mode is where the meat of the gameplay in *GT5 Prologue* occurs. This is where the transition from arcade-style play to simulation-style happens and where you'll hone your driving skills as you conquer event challenges in three increasingly difficult race classes. There are 10 events in each class requiring you to place first, second, or third as you ascend the ladder from C to B to A. You'll purchase new rides as you go and there will be moments of frustration as some challenges seem impossible, but then suddenly something clicks and you'll be on to the next event—that's the great things about *Gran Turismo,* it really does reward you for putting in the seat time. As you conquer each class, you'll earn an otherwise unattainable car and when you've completed the first thirty events, you'll gain access to Class S which is where the real fun begins: intense high speed competition between modified tuner cars.

Once you attain Class S status, the Quick Tune menu becomes accessible as well. This is where *Prologue* separates the poser car fanatics from the true gear heads; you'll be able to adjust a dizzying array of settings for your cars including power, weight, aerodynamics, gear ratios, damper, camber angle, toe angle…just to name a few! If you're a real "man" and know what you're doing, you'll be able to optimize a car's performance to the characteristics of a particular track, if you're a "boy" you'll just be lost. I probably rank somewhere in the "tween" category. Frankly, I prefer the buy-aftermarket-parts-and-modify scheme of previous *GT* games, but that could just be the wanton American consumer in me that doesn't want to actually work hard to go faster.

But enough with the standard features and options, the real question is: How's this puppy drive? And on a certain level, the answer is simple; it's sublime. *Gran Turismo* games simply do it better—they provide a driving experience focused on nuance and detail that requires an investment of time and dedication to fully realize and enjoy. But when it comes to *GT5 Prologue* specifically, there are qualifications, and even some very un-*Gran Turismo*-like characteristics.

Admittedly, the *GT* series has always had a couple fundamental flaws: The computer AI is negligible at best and the lack of damage modeling minimizes the consequences of hitting other cars or barriers. These are deficiencies that *GT* fans

The tuner class cars in *Prologue* are the epitome of speed and performance. Are you up to the challenge?

Racing Online

Polyphony Digital has consistently stated that one of the primary purposes of *GT5 Prologue* is to serve as a test bed for online play for the fully-realized *Gran Turismo 5* game to come. Which is why we were severely disappointed when Sony informed us that its servers wouldn't be up and running in time for us to review the game's online functionality.

While we can't yet say how satisfying the experience is, we do know that *Prologue* supports online races for up to 16 players. The number of competitors can be limited to improve the race experience for those with limited bandwidth, and there are numerous race events with differing vehicle and player experience requirements ensuring that balanced, competitive races will be readily available. If head-to-head competition isn't your thing, a Time Trial mode allows players to try and shave hundredths of a second increments off their lap times to earn a Top 100 ranking.

A News section provides important *Gran Turismo*-related updates and a GT-TV *(Gran Turismo* TV) area provides the first examples of downloadable content in the form of movies and video clips. Sony promises that *GT5 Prologue* will continue to evolve by virtue of DLC. If that means more cars and tracks for the game in the coming months, then the $39.99 price tag for *Prologue* could start to look like a true bargain.

PTOM will give regular updates on the state of *GT5 Prologue* online play as it continues to develop.

Roger's favorite rides in *GT5 Prologue?* The turbocharged, all-wheel-drive goodness of the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X and the Nissan GT-R.

> “There are moments in the game that are transcendent.”

have traditionally been willing to overlook because of the overall excellence of the control interface and driving experience, but in *Prologue*—and perhaps this is because of the focus on incorporating online play—the formerly forgivable flaws have become annoyingly noticeable deficiencies. Mere minutes into your first Class C event race, you'll notice that your computer opponents haven't gotten any smarter in the next-gen. Manage to get past them by hook or by crook and they will quickly drop back off the pace and rarely ever challenge to regain position. In the process of bullying your way through the pack in these early races, you'll discover that there really is no consequence at all for ramming opponents or barriers. In fact, you're eyes will begin to light up when approaching a sharp curve with computer cars just ahead of you as going in full throttle and bouncing off other cars is now merely a great passing strategy. My current record is skipping off three cars in one turn.

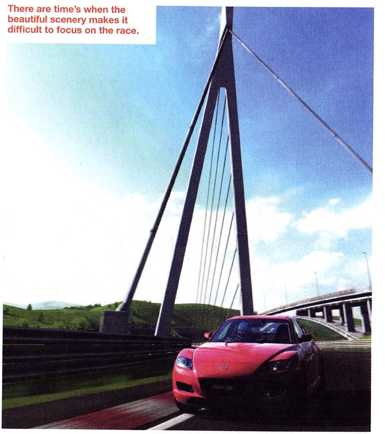
In an even more puzzling turn of events, when you finally attain Class S status, you discover that there's been a paradigm change. Suddenly, a penalty system is in place to address a design deficiency that's been ignored for 30 events and become an integral part of your driving style and racing strategy. Bump a car or nudge a barrier or go off track and your engine cuts out for a few seconds and your car loses all collision detection allowing other cars to pass right through you. If there were at least some consistency to the penalizing it might be grudgingly acceptable, but the actual implementation is infuriatingly arbitrary as major contact is sometimes completely ignored while a minor tap can quickly garner a penalty at other times. The entire penalty system is clumsy, inconsistent, and heavy-handed and uncharacteristic of a franchise that prides itself on realism.

But as uneven an effort that *Prologue* is at times, there are moments in the game that are transcendent. One such moment for me occurred while behind the wheel of a tuned Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X on the road course at Daytona. It was one of my first races in Class S and super cars like the Ferrari F40 and Ford GT surrounded me, but I was completely in control and in my element. I was navigating the course and competing with an intensity, skill, and focus that I knew I hadn't possessed a few days before. My immersion in the game was absolute; my sense of accomplishment was profound. How many driving games can truly claim to do that?

Roger Burchill

★★★★

Detailed car models are a franchise hallmark, both inside and out.



There are time's when the beautiful scenery makes it difficult to focus on the race.

The Garage

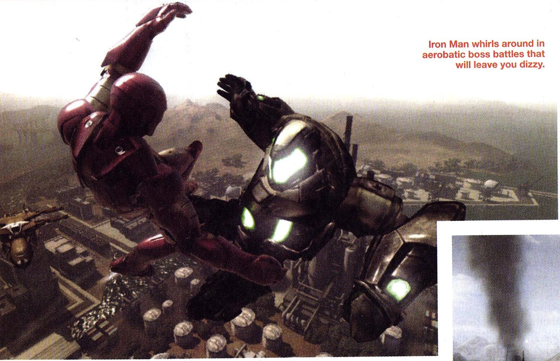
A complete listing of the rides in *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue*.

MANUFACTURER CARS:
Acura NSX '91
Alfa Romeo 147 TI '06
Alfa Romeo Brera 3.2 JTS Q4 '06
Aston Martin DB9 Coupe '06
Audi R8 4.2 FSI '07
Audi TT Coupe 3.2 '07
BMW Z4 '03
BMW 135i Coupe '07
BMW M3 Coupe '07
BMW Concept 1 Series tii '07
Chevrolet Corvette Z06 '06
Citroen C4 Coupe '05
Daihatsu Copen '02
Daihatsu OFC-1 '07
Dodge Viper GTS '02
Dodge Viper SRT10 Coupe '06
Ferrari 599 '06
Ferrari F430 '06
Ferrari F40 '92
Ferrari 512BB '76
Ferrari F2007
Ford Mustang GT '07
Ford GT '06
Ford Focus ST '06
Honda Integra Type R '04
Honda NSX Type R '02
Jaguar XK Coupe '06
Lancia Delta HF integrale Evoluzione '91
Lexus IS F '07
Lotus Elise 111R '04
Lotus Elise '96
Mazda Atenza Sport 25Z '07
Mazda RX-7 Spirit R Type A '02
Mazda RX-8 Type S '07
Mercedes-Benz SL 55 AMG '02
Mini Cooper-S '06
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX GSR '05
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X GSR '07
Nissan Skyline R34 GT-R V-spec II '02
Nissan Fairlady Z Version S '07
Nissan Skyline Sedan 350GT '06
Nissan Skyline Coupe Concept '07
Nissan Skyline Coupe 370GT '07
Nissan GT-R Proto '05
Nissan R35 GT-R '07
Renault Clio Sport V6 '00
Subaru Impreza WRX STI '07
Subaru Impreza WRX STI Type RA '05
Suzuki Cappuccino '95
Suzuki Swift Sport '07
Suzuki Cervo SR '07
TVR Tuscan Speed Six '00
TVR Tamora '02
Volkswagen Golf IV GTI '01
Volkswagen Golf V GTI '05

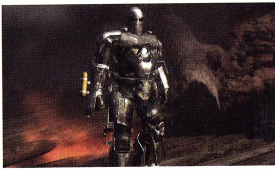
TUNER CARS:
Amuse S2000 GT1 Turbo
Art Morrison Corvette '60
Blitz Dunlop ER34 '07
Mine's BNR34 Skyline GT-R '06

CONCEPT BY GRAN TURISMO CARS:
Gran Turismo 350Z RS
Gran Turismo Corvette Z06/Tuned
Gran Turismo Viper SRT10 Coupe/Tuned
Gran Turismo Ford GT LM Spec II Test Car
Gran Turismo Lotus Elise 111R/Tuned
Gran Turismo Lotus Elise/Tuned
Gran Turismo Lancer Evolution IX/Tuned
Gran Turismo Lancer Evolution X/Tuned
Gran Turismo Skyline Coupe/Tuned
Gran Turismo Clio Sport V6/Tuned
Gran Turismo Suzuki Cappuccino/HP Tuned
Gran Turismo Swift Sport/Tuned

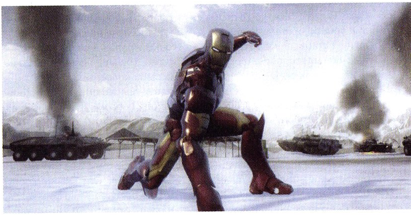
It's true in real-life, it's true in the game: The dealer screws you on trade-in. It's better to repeat events to earn credits than to resell your rides.



Iron Man whirls around in aerobatic boss battles that will leave you dizzy.



The game begins with Tony escaping his captors in his jerry-rigged rust-bucket of a starter suit.



Fall to the earth and you'll execute a Ground Strike attack, damaging everything in the vicinity. Better yet, you're in position for an impromptu game of touch football.

Iron Man

Metal of dishonor

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.95 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Sega **DEVELOPER:** Secret Level

PS3 | R

If I were Tony Stark, I'd be angry right now. I'd probably offer up some sort of witty quip, but beneath the snarky humor would lie a dark resolve. I'd do something about it—whatever "it" happens to be.

The problem is that I'm not Tony Stark. I'm Gary Steinman, and I'm reviewing a game about Mr. Stark and his fanciful metallic suit. I must play this game, I cannot fix it, and I am frustrated. After all, unlike Mr. Stark, I'm not a brilliant inventor—but I do know one thing: This game isn't very much fun.

And that's too bad, because *Iron Man* has the potential to be a fantastic license. Who wouldn't want to slip into a sleek suit of futuristic armor and zip through the air punching jets right in the snoot? Unfortunately, you need to be a billionaire genius just to wrap your head around the control scheme (or perhaps just a genius—though money always helps). An Iron Man suit certainly can do a lot, what with its plasma core, repulsors, thrusters, missiles, micro-grenades, unibeam, life support…phew! My head's spinning just thinking of how much power is at my fingertips. Too bad the game's developer couldn't find an elegant way to harness that power. This isn't a flight sim, yet *Iron Man* requires a level of button-juggling that you might expect when you enter the cockpit of an F-22 Raptor. The fact that I was constantly thinking about what button to push, even as I was rounding into the final set of missions, well…that's just a big design no-no.

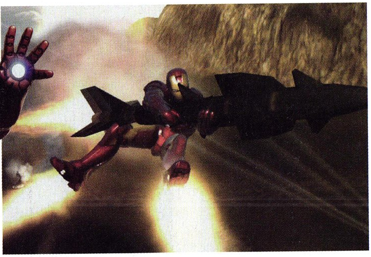
To be fair, there are moments of exhilaration to be found within the game. As you earn better weapons and armor, you finally gain enough raw power to demolish waves of enemies efficiently or shoot down a barrage of missiles from the sky (or chopsocky that aforementioned jet right in the nose cone). Yet those moments are marred by the repetitive missions (often with incoherent objectives) set in dreadfully drab environs. A few levels are almost absurdly tough on anything but the easiest of the three difficulty settings—and if you do take the easy way out, those levels often devolve into dull wars of attrition. Can you hold out long enough and blast away at enough bad people, places, things to finally defeat whatever it is that's bugging Mr. Stark?

Then again, Tony built the Iron Man just for himself; he never meant for anyone else to control it, ever. So maybe he can figure out the control scheme, or have more fun in the various missions. But I'm not Tony Stark, and neither are you.

Gary Steinman

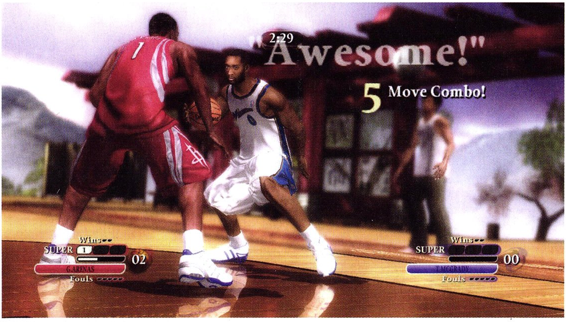
★★

What do Iron Man and Gene Simmons have in common? They're both unlockable characters in *Tony Hawk's Underground!*

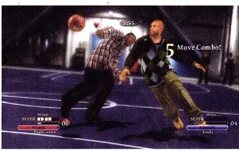


Even missiles need hugs.

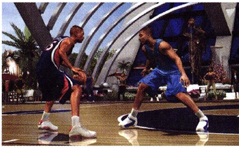
Forget Magic and Bird—our favorite legend? Pistol Pete Maravich who averaged 44 points a game in college with no three-point line.



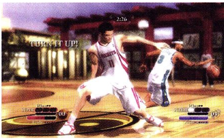
Amass combo points and execute over-the-top super moves in this basketball title that feels surprisingly like a fighting game.



Sweaters make sports more fun!



Set as a reality show, the game can justify the unconventional environs.



Is this a b-ball court or a dance floor or a bit of both?

NBA Ballers:

Chosen One

Even a ballsy NBA can't save this repetitive baller

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Midway Games DEVELOPER: Midway Amusement Games

You've got to love the NBA. While other professional leagues are selling out for exclusive game deals, the NBA still has attitude. Not only do you have five licensed videogames to choose from this year, but two arcade hoops titles as well, including the crazy over-the-top *NBA Ballers: Chosen One*.

Midway continues to hone its arcade sports formula, from the classic *NBA Jam* all the way up to *Blitz: The League*. *Chosen One* stresses the NBA lifestyle as much as dunks and tricks. As such, you'll ditch rundown street courts and play in glitzy converted nightclubs and aboard luxury yachts in a variety of one-on-one, one-on-one-on-one, and two-on-two contests. The 65-plus NBA stars and legends are introduced in slick cinematic cut scenes, like D-Wade pulling up in his sports car or Gilbert Arenas rolling in slow motion with his posse. And if Kobe driving a yacht to the court doesn't get you excited, this ain't the game for you.

The story mode is presented with just as much verve. You create your custom baller, distribute attribute points, and outfit him in anything from gym shorts to a three-piece suit. Don't worry—your attributes don't take a hit if you don a fedora, snakeskin boots, and eight pounds of bling. If only the gameplay were this fashionable.

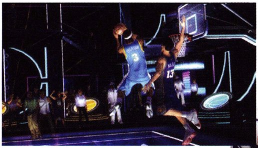
Sure, the super dunks/steals/shots/blocks are awesome the first three times you see them. Once triggered, the action grinds to a halt while you watch your player break-dance on a defender's back or spin kick the ball in the hole. Stylish, yes, but you're going to groan when cut scenes take you out of the action for the tenth time in one game. The effect is really just an HD upgrade from the dunk scenes in the original NES classic *Double Dribble.* At least there are dozens of these Shut 'Em Down moves to unlock as you play.

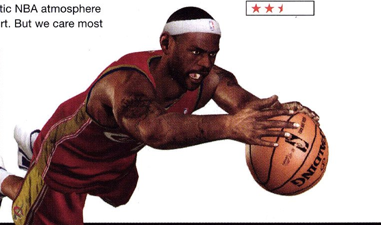
The story mode is hosted by hoops fan and rap legend Chuck D of Public Enemy fame. The FMV cut scenes feature interviews with NBA stars and a slick studio presentation, and you instantly respect all the hard work that Midway put into delivering authentic NBA atmosphere off the court. But we care most about the action on the court, and the gameplay hits and misses. You'll dig tougher moves like alley-oops and a give-and-go with fans in the crowd. But the Act A Fool combo system is formulaic and repetitive, and being able to run past defenders and dunk the ball uncontested is about as much fun as point-shaving referee scandals.

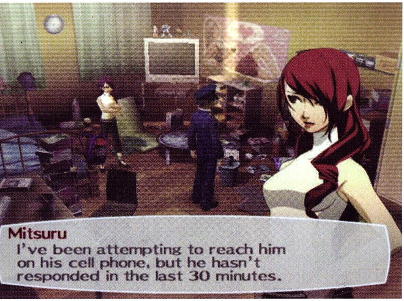
Give *Chosen One* credit for its polished presentation and solid story mode, but its focus on highlight-reel style gets in the way of its gameplay substance.

Jonathan Miller

★★½

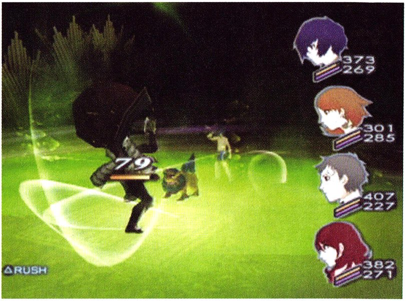






Mitsuru
I've been attempting to reach him on his cell phone, but he hasn't responded in the last 30 minutes.

In terms of recent RPGs on the PS2, *FES* is one of the absolute best.



The combat style of *Persona 3* hasn't changed.

Persona 3 FES

Multiple Persona-lities

PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: Atlus

Considering the direction Japanese RPGs have taken over the past few years, finding one that doesn't require a Ph.D. to comprehend from a gameplay standpoint is a rare occurrence indeed. Getting that game courtesy of Atlus is even more surprising.

But that's exactly what happened last year with the release of *Persona 3*. Atlus' dark, yet charming RPG struck all the right chords and boasted incredible depth without the murky and confusing gameplay systems and miles-deep menus that clog so many other JRPGs. Unearthing new Personas to utilize during battle—and fusing them to create new powers—was fun and intuitive.

Even so, *Persona 3* was, for all intents and purposes, a dungeon crawl. The main goal was to traverse one randomly generated level after another, fighting legions of enemies and the odd boss character. But formulaic gameplay was made much more attractive by the dual roles played by its characters. Demon-slayers by night, our heroes were mostly high school students by day. And going to school each day (not to mention hanging out at the mall, praying at the shrine, and so forth) helped break up the action. Socializing with fellow students results in stronger Personas which pays monster hunting dividends.

This year, Atlus has enhanced its RPG success with an expansion pack of sorts—*Persona 3 FES* comes with a complete version of the original title, updated with more Personas, a weapon-fusion system, and a new difficulty setting. More importantly, *FES* comes with an all-new game chapter—one that continues the storyline of the original game. This bonus 30-hour outing reveals the real ending to *Persona 3.*

Yukari
I've got a couple spare outfits, if you wanna try one on. How about it?

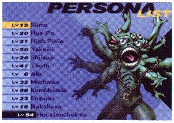
We dare not say a single word about this screenshot. Honest. Oh my.

Mysterious doors and floating staircases, a hallmark of JRPGs.

After School

Elizabeth
Excuse me. I'd like to purchase a "school lunch"...

Excuse us. We'd like to purchase a "diet soda"...and less air quotes.



Lv 12	Slime
Lv 20	Hua Po
Lv 21	High Pixie
Lv 50	Yaksini
Lv 26	Shiisaa
Lv 41	Thoth
Lv 6	Alp
Lv 32	Mothman
Lv 56	Kumbhanda
Lv 23	Empusa
Lv 16	Rakshasa
Lv 54	Hecatoncheires

Three cheers for toothy, googly-eyed, multi-armed Personas!

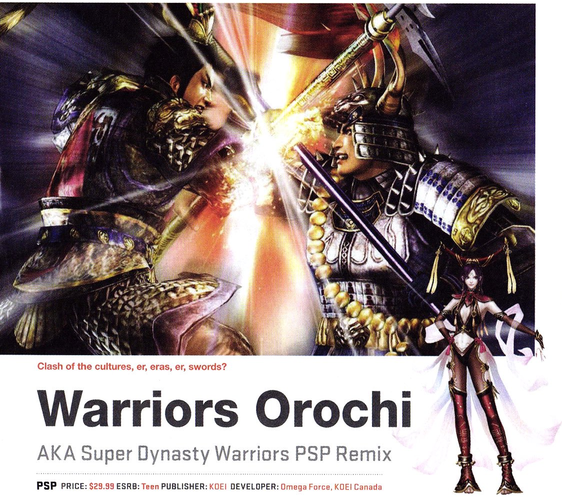
The beauty is that you don't need to play through the whole game again (unless you want to; it is included, after all), or even transfer your old save file. You have access to this new chapter right from the title screen.

Be warned. Though the new chapter is very good, it's also combat heavy and sports a moderately high difficulty level. Gone is the socialization between dungeon crawls, and the game suffers a bit for it. But if you take the new chapter for what it is—an expansion pack—then you won't be disappointed. At $30, the hit to your wallet is very easy to take, whether you're a *Persona* rookie or veteran.

Greg Sewart

★★★★

This is only the third game in the *Persona* sub-series, but the overarching "Megaten" series has been running for over 20 years and features over 40 different games.



Clash of the cultures, er, eras, er, swords?

Warriors Orochi

AKA Super Dynasty Warriors PSP Remix

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: KOEI DEVELOPER: Omega Force, KOEI Canada

When demon lord Orochi supernaturally mixes China's Three Kingdoms civil strife era (circa 200 CE) with Japan's Warring States period (late 1400s), we expected a rift in the space-time continuum. You know, the kind that would collapse the universe, like Doc Brown warned about in *Back to the Future*. Instead, we found just another hack-and-slash spin-off.

Don't let the lack of a digit or subtitle fool you. *Warriors Orochi* is cut from the same cloth as its many predecessors. Indeed, *Orochi* "conveniently" picked the exact two eras that (ahem) just happen to be the settings for the *Dynasty Warriors* and *Samurai Warriors* games. This time around, a new team battle approach allows you to swap characters on a whim, but the feature doesn't affect what's still primarily a button-mashing action experience starring an ancient Chinese or Japanese hero squaring off against hundreds of generic goons on a massive battlefield.

An epic amount of content is available, with four distinct story campaigns (each with eight core missions and seven optional ones) and 79 playable characters, but it rarely diverges from what has become a rote template. Nearly every mission revolves around beating down a collection of overly similar bosses, and the tactics don't vary significantly between the various fighters—just repeatedly tap the square button and occasionally toss in a charged or Musou (special) attack. Lengthy missions and endless waves of enemies exacerbate the tedium.

On the plus side, the PSP port of the six-month-old PS2 release is one of the better console-to-handheld transitions we've seen recently, with the full battlefield available in each mission (previous franchise ports segmented the map into cells). Simplified character models and a remarkably thin draw distance (there's fog everywhere) can generally be overlooked, and the new comic-style cut scenes work well on the platform. In the end, however, *Warriors Orochi* is just a solid port of an unremarkable brawler.

Andrew Hayward

★★½

146
K.O.COUNT

After you kill a couple hundred of these guys, it all just starts to blur together.

More than 20 different *Warriors* games have seen release on a PlayStation platform since 1997.

It's like that recurring dream where you walk around in your underwear...

Arcana Heart

Hot girl-on-girl-on-giant-blob action

PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: Ecole

If you're the type who already knows what this is, go ahead and buy it—odds are you'll love it. For everyone else, your enjoyment of *Arcana Heart* will come down to how much you like watching 11 fetishy anime girls—including a sword-wielding maid and a thong-sporting android—beat the syrupy-cute crap out of each other. There's some depth underneath the pretty exterior, thanks to 11 companion "elementals" that grant your fighter additional special moves and abilities, but in the main this is old school, button-mashing 2D silliness. Add in flashy combos and screen-filling super-attacks, and *Arcana* makes for an enjoyable, if guilty, pleasure.

Mikel Reparaz

★★★

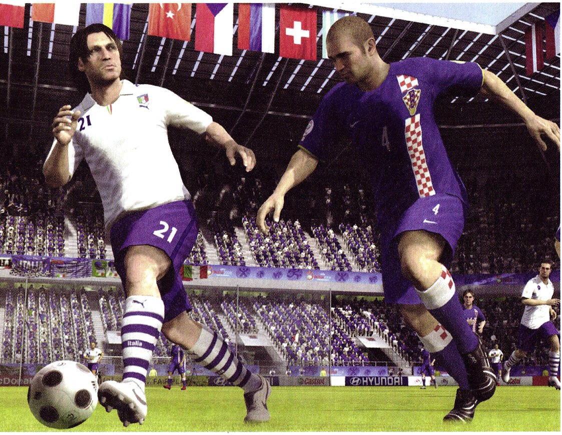
A nonsensical, paper-thin story accompanies the combo-driven gameplay.

PSP | R

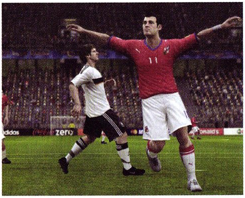
PS2 | R

"Hadouken!" Oh, wait...wrong game.

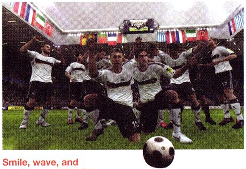
Green hair, maid outfit, giant sword: ingredients for a killer anime show.



Oh my, what color-conscious spectators.



A soaring hawk and pecking chicken...maybe it's just us, but this victory shot reminds us of birds.



Smile, wave, and say "cheese" for the camera.

With three championships (1972, 1980, and 1996), Germany has won more European Championship titles than any other country. (More importantly and disappointingly, England has never won it.)

UEFA Euro 2008

EA puts its best footie forward

PS3 | **R**

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA Canada

Despite all the official licenses and flashy presentation, EA soccer titles have always played second fiddle to Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer* series in the gameplay department. Those days are coming to an end. With *UEFA Euro 2008*, EA has finally created a soccer title that rivals *PES* on and off the pitch. Of course, U.S. soccer fans may be asking: What the heck is Euro 2008?

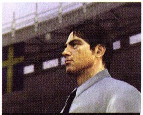
Alongside its other soccer licenses, EA retains the rights to the vaunted European championship tournament, a sort of mini-World Cup exclusive to the continent, held every four years. Although we're mostly oblivious to the tourney stateside, Euro 2008 is a big deal across the pond. *FIFA* one-offs of this type have typically been devoid of any deep features in the past, but *UEFA Euro 2008* is, like a good German bier stein, filled to the brim with appealing content.

First you have the tourney itself, where you can compete in the qualifying rounds as any of the 52 national European squads to earn a berth among the 16-team final being held this summer in Austria and Switzerland. Not familiar with Italy's last-minute victory over Scotland to secure a spot in the finals? Jump into the Story of Qualifying mode and play through 35 historic scenarios, earning points for completing team and individual challenges. But where this game really shines is online, with leagues and a 16-team knockout cup—something EA's World Cup title desperately needed. There's also a sweet persistent tracking system called Battle of the Nations. Simply choose your favorite country and earn points every time you play. At the end of the day, points are compiled on EA's servers and the country with the most points takes home a daily championship—a nice evolution of *FIFA*'s interactive leagues feature.

None of these sweet features would matter if the action on the pitch wasn't solid, and we're happy to report that this is EA's best gameplay effort yet. Players are quick and responsive, and special attention has been paid to long passing and skill moves that showcase the ankle-breaking abilities of studs like Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo. The back line needs to do a better job of marking attackers, and header goals are all too easy to come by, but the game plays great overall—a true reminder of why we call soccer "the beautiful game".

Jonathan Miller

★★★★



Oh Captain My Captain

The new Captain Your Country mode lets you play as one player (created or existing) for the duration of the tourney. After each game you earn a rating and a handful of XP to upgrade your skills. The goal is to outplay your teammates and earn the approval of your manager, and the captain's armband. Sure, we all want to dominate the field with powerhouses like Italy and England, but you'll earn beaucoup bonus points if you guide a Cinderella like San Marino to the tourney final. Choose wisely, captain.

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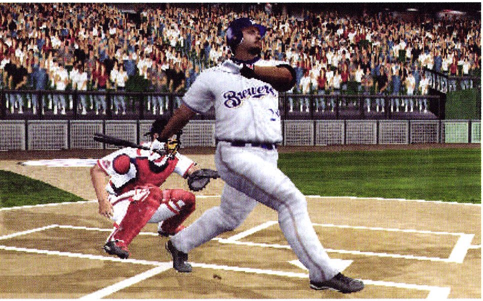
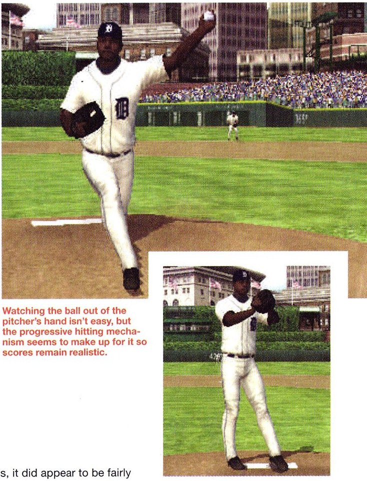


Brewers slugger Prince Fielder fills most of the small screen!



Watching the ball out of the pitcher's hand isn't easy, but the progressive hitting mechanism seems to make up for it so scores remain realistic.

MLB 08:

The Show

Just as tough to beat on the road as at home

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEA San Diego

PSP | R
PS2 | R

Our general love of the *MLB: The Show* franchise is pretty well documented. The opportunity to take that addiction on the road, and essentially have an ongoing season at our fingertips 24/7 is more appealing than you can possibly imagine (or we should readily admit). *MLB 08: The Show* effectively recreates much of the experience of the big brother PS3 while the obvious limitations of the platform keep it from truly excelling as a purists baseball experience.

All the interface and menu controls of the PS3 are intact, so anyone familiar with that will get along with these controls in a jiffy. Starting a season or embarking on a Road to the Show (2.0) career is simple enough, and you'll start in Spring Training (all of which can be simulated) to get used to the controls before heading to the important regular season. On the field, the game feels pretty good, but that ball, and the pitching controls are pretty damn small on the PSP screen. Timing is crucial when pitching since actually seeing the line indicating the ideal pitch release point is virtually impossible. Still, your catcher offers useful pitch selections, and though I found the analog stick a little unresponsive at times, it did appear to be fairly forgiving of missed targets.

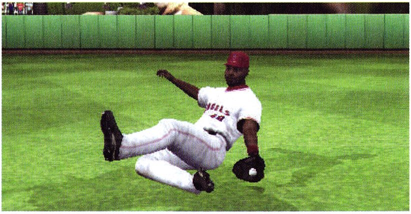
The hitting system utilizes the progressive tracking system over a season where a player can hit above (or below) his career stats to simulate realistic streaks. Robbing home runs by tracking down fly balls and timing your fielder's leap over the fence is also possible in this version. So is simulating seasons, though it can take a little while for the processor to calculate all the permutations. (We experimented with our Giants again, and the PSP version gave them a 71-91 season (after starting 20-22), versus the 69-93 we got on the PS3.)

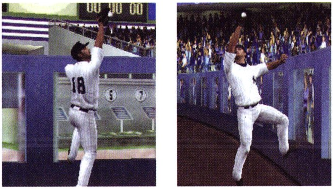
A cool addition is also the ability to play your own music playlist from anything you have stored on your Memory Stick Duo (as you can from the hard drive on the PS3 version). We did see a couple of odd commentary glitches (congratulating the pitcher on a hitless inning when he gave up two home runs) but they didn't detract from what is a very complete, eminently playable handheld baseball experience. If you just have to take *The Show* on the road, this is the way to do it.

Rob Smith

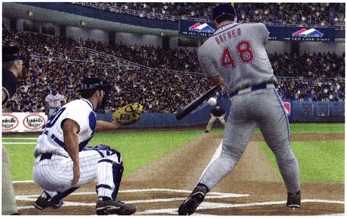
★★★★

Roger started following the Giants in 1984 when they lost over 100 games. So he already knows the pain that fans will feel this year!





Though the fielding controls on the PSP version don't allow you to "power-up" your throws to base, you can rob home runs.



The PS2 version also includes the new progressive batting system, letting you track at-bats and affect player stats.

MLB 08:

The Show

Still swinging for the fences

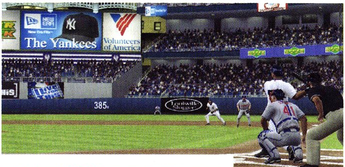
PS2 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEA San Diego

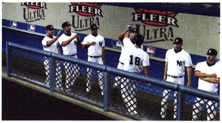
Ensuring no PlayStation gamer is left behind; the PS2 version of this year's office favorite baseball sim provides most of the experience available in its PS3 big brother. The on-field action and player animations are excellent (though the PS2 appears to drop 10 lbs from some of the, ahem, bigger players—David Ortiz looks positively slim!), and the range of features is enough to keep you busy for the entire season.

If you have your PS2 networked, the opportunity to play in 30-team online leagues is a huge draw. We didn't find many open leagues for sign-up, but without a doubt the options should improve over the next month or so. The pitching mechanism does seem to move a little swifter than either the PSP or PS3 versions, and catching up with high-90s heaters while in the batter's box is tricky. But the volume of options, including the Home Run Derby and King of the Diamond, will keep any fan busy. And since we're keeping score across all three versions, in our first season on PS2, much of which was simmed, the Giants posted a 75-87 record, the best of the three versions—so maybe we'll stick with this one!

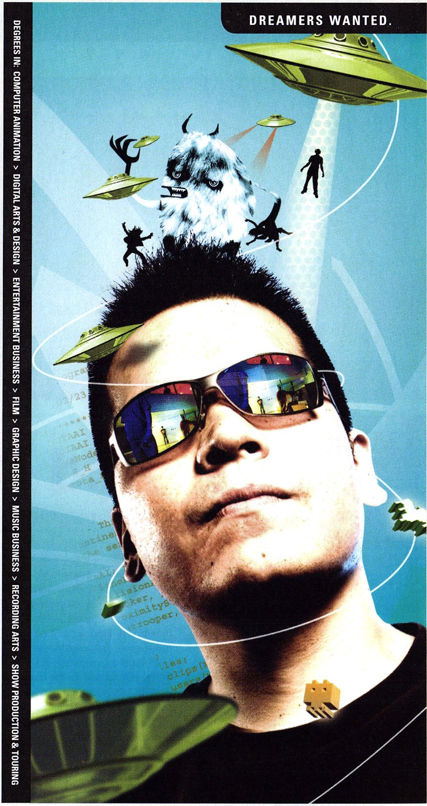
Rob Smith

★★★★





The animation detail is excellent on the field, in the dugout, and even in the locker rooms.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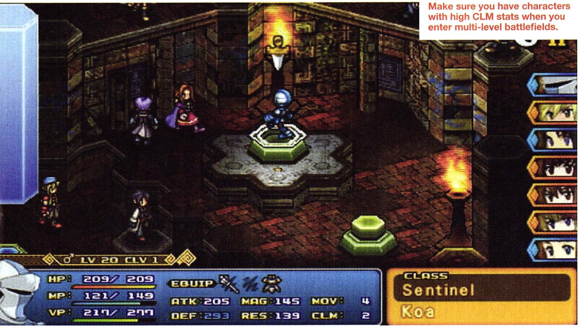
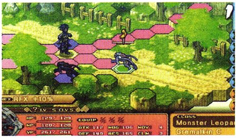
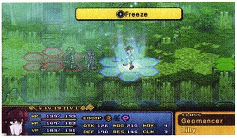


Make sure you have characters with high CLM stats when you enter multi-level battlefields.

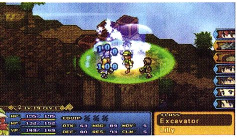


Clarissa's Dandelion Shot allows her to attack in a straight line in any direction.



Watch where you are! The hexagonal grid opens up the field to a range of strategic attack options.

It's pronounced, "crossfire."



Some items and spells affect everyone in the target area—friend or foe.

PSP | R

Wild ARMs XF

The west was won a single hex at a time

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: XSEED Games DEVELOPER: Media.Vision

Most strategy RPGs sport a wicked learning curve. Like in chess, considerable effort is needed to master the nuances of a complex turn-based battle system with multiple characters squaring off on diverse terrain. In the case of *Wild ARMs XF,* that curve is more like a *cliff*—and if you're not ready for it, it'll knock you flat onto your keister.

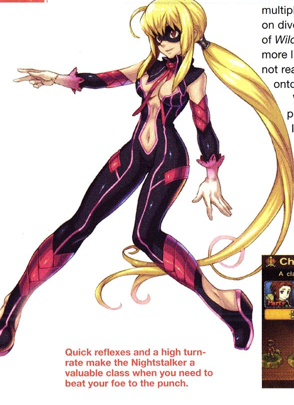
Which is exactly what happened to me a few hours in. It started out as a pleasant return to Filgaia, complete with the series' trademark mash-up of anime-inspired Wild West motifs and steampunk trappings. I've always enjoyed the *Wild ARMs*-series, despite its constant flirtation with mediocrity; its first foray into the SRPG genre was shaping up to be a likable diversion.

That is, until my ragtag team had to bust out a group of innocent townies held captive. Springing them from jail proved easy enough: Just sneak around and avoid being sighted by guards. (Which, by the way, was a nifty use of the battle grid; it was the first time I recall playing a stealth-only mission in an SRPG, and it proved to be just one of many unique mission objectives.) But the ensuing escort mission to safety? I had to replay it at least half a dozen times, literally hurling my PSP to the floor in abject frustration (thank goodness for plush carpeting!) before investing a couple more hours to leveling up and experimenting with the class system. After another few attempts, I finally beat the battle with a pair of Gadgeteers handling the healing process, along with a Halberdier to tackle the rear guard with the help of Tony (no class change for him—he's a dog, after all). As for my Martial Mage, I moved him from the head of the pack into the middle of the scrum to tackle that dastardly prison warden.

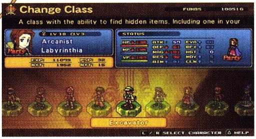
Not an RPG guy? Then allow me to break it down: In the process of defeating this level, I discovered a deep combat system that requires a constant shuffling of classes. Unlike most SRPGs, you can't simply rush in with your favorite leveled-up fighters and hope for the best. You literally have to pick and choose character classes before every major battle and then re-equip your sub-skills, equipment, and items. It can be a bit tedious—the constant fiddling with menus and the inability to create an army of uber-powerful specialists is a drag at times—but if you're a fan of the "S" in SRPGs, then *XF* comes recommended.

Gary Steinman

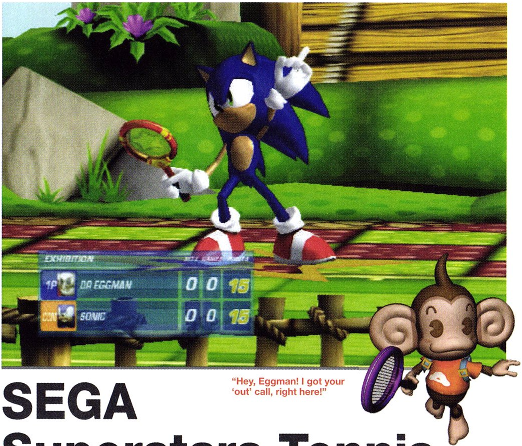
★★★½



Quick reflexes and a high turn-rate make the Nightstalker a valuable class when you need to beat your foe to the punch.


Change Class
FUNDS 100510
A class with the ability to find hidden items. Including one in your
Arcanist
Labyrinthia
STATUS
Party
Excavator
L / R SELECT CHARACTER △ HELP

You'll be swapping classes before almost every major battle, finding the best combination of stats and skills to meet your objectives.



"Hey, Eggman! I got your 'out' call, right here!"

SEGA Superstars Tennis

For Sega fans, the score is love-love

PS2 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Sega

Sega fans jealous of the mascot-packed sports titles over in Nintendo's camp can stop whining: *SEGA Superstars Tennis* brims with familiar faces and easily does for Sega's faithful what *Mario Strikers* did for Nintendo's fanboys. Sixteen Sega favorites—including Sonic, Tails, Ulala, Amiga, NiGHTS, and even an unlockable Alex Kidd—are accounted for in this arcade-style tennis title, and they swing their racquets on drenched-in-detail courts in time to music from their respective properties. Each character possesses a familiar power-up (triggered by either shoulder button): *Super Monkey Ball's* AiAi chucks bananas, Sonic unleashes a mean ball spin as Super Sonic, and Ulala showers the court with hypnotic dance-inducing Morolians. The fan service is simply through the roof!

DR EGGMAN 0 0 40
SONIC 0 0 30

"I am the eggman, they are the eggmen, I am the walrus, goo goo g'joob."

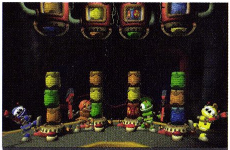
While it's no *Top Spin* in terms of complexity and realism, *SEGA Superstars Tennis* features a solid, albeit simple, set of mechanics: serve by pressing X in time with a power meter, and execute lobs, slices, and drop shots through specific inputs of the square and X buttons. Also unlike *Top Spin,* this game doesn't take itself too seriously; the emphasis is on fun, wacky, non-traditional game modes that showcase some of Sega's most famous franchises. Playing in a *House of the Dead*-inspired stadium, we showed court-crossing zombies the business end of our backhand, while the *Jet Set Radio*-theme had us avoiding riot police as giant boom-box speakers blared courtside.

If you're a fan of these classic franchises and enjoy arcadey, pick-up-and-play tennis games, then grab your racket for this Sega-soaked entry.

Matt Cabral

★★★★

Care to share your Sega fandom? Check out the PS3 version for online multiplayer.



Press the colored button that matches the bottom barrel to knock it off the stage. Familial bonding and color blindness-testing in one convenient package!

Buzz! Junior Robo Jam

It's family game night! Now, sit down or you're grounded!

PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ($39.99 with controllers) ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPERS: Magenta Software, FreeStyle Games

What can tug a smile from our lips faster than dancing robots? How about kids watching those robots while honing their reflexes, color recognition, and hand-eye coordination?

Using the *Buzz!* controllers, four tots can customize robot avatars and participate in a variety of mini-games (24 total). Some are plays on traditional games (Piston Peril is a take on the classic Hot Potato) while others manage to be simultaneously entertaining and educational (Odd Bot Out, Pop-Up Pairs). They all possess some sort of speed or timing element to make them more competitive.

The graphics are somewhat lacking and the instructions aren't always clear, but if you're looking for a way to bond with the under-twelve crowd via a videogame, you'll likely have a good time playing *Robo Jam.*

Teresa Dun

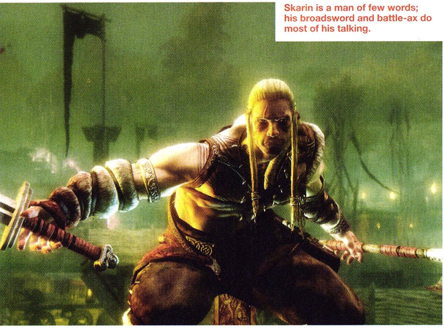
★★★

0040
BLUE
6420
0920
ORANGE
3240
0600
GREEN
2390
0330
YELLOW
0490

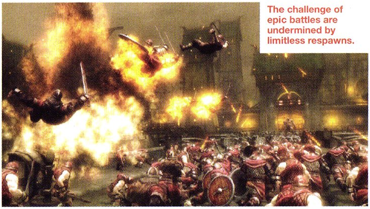
Do robots feel pain when others mock them? Speaking of which, do you think they dream of electric sheep?

Gary, our office *Robo Jam* champ, has let victory get to his head. He's now demanding that we all call him "Plum," the name of his *Robo Jam* avatar.

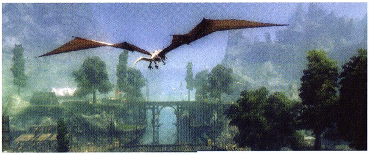
PS2 | R



Skarin is a man of few words; his broadsword and battle-ax do most of his talking.



The challenge of epic battles are undermined by limitless respawns.



Dragon friends give the Vikings airborne strike capability.

Fans of rampaging Norseman must watch *The Vikings*, available on DVD. Inspired barbaric performances by Kirk Douglas and Ernest Borgnine distinguish the 1958 film...er, classic.

Viking:

Battle for Asgard

Hel's bent on destruction so kick some Asgard

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: The Creative Assembly

The back-story for *Viking: Battle for Asgard* centers around a war between two Goddesses. Hel, Queen of the Underworld, blames Freya, Goddess of Light, for her exile from Asgard and a serious case of varicose veins. As customary when two women hate each other, a man (or mankind) is caught in the middle. In this case, Skarin, a Viking of the strong, silent, brooding, romance novel-cover mode, is Freya's champion charged with preventing Hel's undead hordes from transforming Midgard into her own private Valhalla.

While *Viking* does sport RPG-esque elements, action-oriented weapon-based combat is the cornerstone of its gameplay. To its credit, the mechanics for offing bad guys is intricate enough to avoid pure button-masher status. While you don't need to reference a massive combo list, moves need to be learned and mastered. Combo linking capability, and blocking and dodging maneuvers that are actually useful, add depth to the fighting system. The gory, graphic, and gratuitous finishing sequences are presented with cinematic flair and are one of the most satisfying elements of the game.

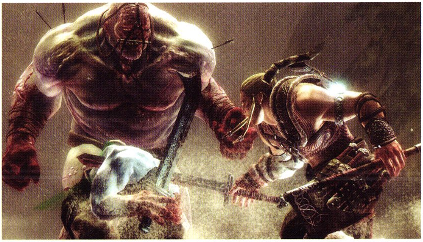
In addition to the one-on-one bloodfest, there are periodic epic battles in which Skarin summons his Viking brethren to attack a major enemy stronghold. These battles do increase in duration and intensity throughout the game—and they make for great screenshots—but they're a hit and miss experience. Hit, in that it makes for good eye candy while you're maneuvering to key objectives, and miss, in that the touted "strategic control of the battlefield" is merely directing your dragons to attack the objectives you chose to ignore.

The game's 3D environments are attractive, expansive, and admirably intricate but riddled with annoying inconsistencies. Why can you explore some areas and navigate over certain items in some instances, and not in others? Admittedly, developers often impose exploratory limitations to favor game flow, but these inconsistencies seem jarring in an otherwise free-roaming world. And while it's fun traipsing all over the Nordic isles, the mini-quests develop a repetitive flavor and you can run smack dab into the "invisible" linear progression of the game if you become overly ambitious in your explorations.

But perhaps the biggest disappointment is that after hours of flawed yet relatively enjoyable gameplay, the final showdown with Hel—and the story's resolution—seems abrupt and sadly, unepic. After all, what good is a classic catfight if there just isn't much to say about it afterwards?

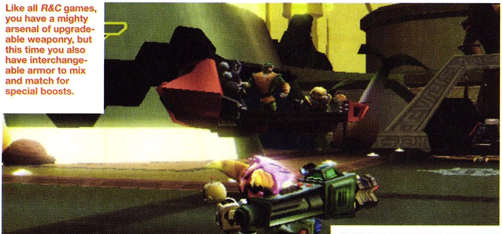
Roger Burchill

★★★

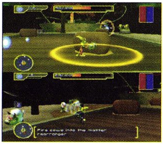


Facing off against a giant is one of the more thrilling confrontations in the game.

The Mootator isn't Ratchet's first weapon to turn foes into farm animals. That would be the chicken-converting Morph-o-Ray from the first *Ratchet & Clank.*



Like all *R&C* games, you have a mighty arsenal of upgradeable weaponry, but this time you also have interchangeable armor to mix and match for special boosts.



New split-screen multiplayer modes were added to the PS2 port, but they unfortunately forgot to program in any fun.

Ratchet & Clank:
Size Matters

Bigger isn't always better

PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: High Impact Games

Some see the fact that games are now being ported from PSP to PS2 as a sign that time is running out for Sony's second system. I, on the other hand, am tickled pink. With developers devoting significant resources to our favorite handheld, it only makes sense to let us play the better titles on a bigger screen.

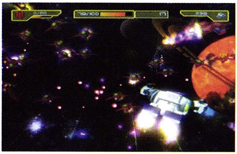
It's with that happy thought in mind that I approached *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*, a generally well-received *R&C* release for PSP whose only major knock was the control scheme. The PSP controls weren't bad, mind you—just occasionally vexing when the lack of dual-analog control made strafing problematic.

Unfortunately, *Size Matters* is a shining example of truth in advertising—the name really does say it all. Take a game meant for a handheld and put it on the PS2, and all of a sudden every flaw is magnified. For starters, the game just looks...well, not good. Stylistically, much of what makes *R&C* so charming is intact, but there's an uncanny valley effect: It's close enough to make you realize how much it misses the mark, thanks to limited polygons, blocky environments, oddly dull sound effects, and mediocre cut scenes. And it's not just the aesthetics that suffer. Gameplay is hampered by a sticky, unfriendly camera; control is hindered by imprecise aiming, touchy jumping, and odd problems with strafing (sometimes you can, sometimes you can't); and the level design is lacking when compared with just about any of the better platformers available on PS2. In fact, several of the levels are egregiously unpleasant. (I'm looking at you, "Dreamtime." Was it really necessary to blur the edges of the screen while putting a chokehold on my camera control?!)

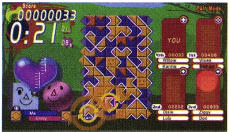
Still, it's a *Ratchet & Clank* game, and as such it offers up the extensive variety of upgradeable weaponry and nifty gadgetry we've come to love. That alone almost makes this one worth playing. However, with three incredible *R&C* games and one very good *Ratchet*-only release on PS2, it's tough to recommend this title. Size does indeed matter—but this time you're better off going small.

Gary Steinman

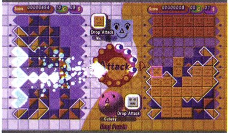
★★



Giant Clank hurtles through the cosmos in a shooting level that's about as exciting as a NASA budget meeting.



Collect points by rotating blocks to form shapes out of the yellow parts. The yellow must be completely enclosed by a white border for it to count. Excited yet?



If these avatars are supposed to be "cute," then the developers have obviously never seen a kitten.

Puzzle Guzzle

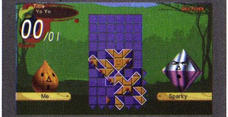
Not quite as guzzle-able as its name suggests

PSP PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Agetec DEVELOPER: Irem Software Engineering

Frustrating. Unbalanced. Dull. Those are three adjectives we unfortunately have to use to describe *Puzzle Guzzle*. From a gameplay premise that feels slapped together—form cohesive shapes out of partially colored blocks—to an unappetizing presentation (the avatars are simply ugly), *Puzzle Guzzle* lacks the addictive quality so essential to puzzle games. The game boasts three modes as well as multiplayer, but we found them all dry and convoluted—except one. The Quiz Puzzle mode sets up pieces that you have to "solve" in a limited number of moves. Outside of that one challenging mode, even hardcore puzzle fans will find *Puzzle Guzzle* skippable.

Teresa Dun

★½



The mildly entertaining Quiz Puzzle mode is as good as it gets gameplay-wise. *Puzzle Guzzle?!* More like Shizzle Fizzle.

You can steal one aspect (eyes, shape) from every avatar you defeat. With 100 challengers, that's a lot of possibilities...too bad they're all bland.

NO MONEY DOWN

Let's face it: Gaming is an expensive hobby. But that doesn't mean you always have to pay to play. Sometimes, the best things in life can be free—especially when it comes to PSN. Then again, time is money, so to save you some of both, we picked our fave freebies in the PlayStation Store. Enjoy!

>DEMOS

Not all demos are created equal. Some are too restrictive, some too short, some so cluttered with text that you can't actually play. We scoured every single page of the PlayStation Store (yes, literally) to find the ones with the most to offer. Keep in mind though, that we're recommending free demos here; when it comes to the full game, be sure to read our actual review before slapping down your hard-earned cash.

TOP PICK

Devil May Cry 4

The two modes in the *DMC4* demo give a taste of the game's over-the-top action sequences and stunning environs—all without costing a penny. "Mission: Exterminator" is generously sprinkled with cut scenes, battles, and exploration throughout. "Mission: Executioner" pits you against some tougher monsters, giving you the opportunity to delve into the subtleties of the game's combat controls. Try it!

Devil May Cry 4

OTHER PICKS

▶ Go! Sudoku

Surprised? We were, too. This demo offers a dozen puzzles of varying difficulty. Fans of the pen-and-paper version must give the frantic Solo Arcade mode a try.

▶ Stranglehold

It's Tequila Time. That means slow-motion dives, rolls, and other over-the-top badass moves as Tequila interacts with the destructible environments around him.

▶ Lemmings

An oldie, but a goodie. Even with only five levels, this demo will have you scratching your head as you muddle through each stage.

▶ Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction

It ends abruptly, but this *R&C* demo is worth downloading just to watch the Pixar-worthy cut scenes. The richly colored settings and small dose of platforming bliss don't hurt either.

▶ MotorStorm

Rip through a dizzying mesa in this racing title that even non-driving fans will enjoy. Oh, yeah—and get psyched for *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift* in the process.

▶ MLB 08: The Show

Perhaps a bit dense for newcomers to sports games, this baseball demo is a treat for veteran ball players. Go Giants!

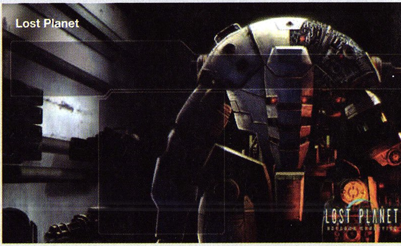
>THEMES

Themes can be deceptive—they sit pretty in the PlayStation Store, but once installed, they might render your menu text unreadable with their bright white backgrounds, make your ears bleed with constant and annoying sound effects, or worst of all, horrify you with their utter lack of aesthetic appeal. Below are the best themes currently available.

TOP PICK

Lost Planet

Ah, if only all themes were like this! To accommodate its handful of background images (which load randomly when you boot up your PS3), the *Lost Planet* theme has a shaded, translucent box behind the menus to ensure readability. The clean interface, slick lines, and crisp sound effects round it out as our top choice.



Lost Planet

OTHER PICKS

▶ Uncharted

An old favorite, the heavily detailed background and icons make us feel as if we're on an adventure with Nathan Drake himself.

▶ God of War: Chains of Olympus – Eclipse Theme

Gorgeous rotating background images featuring high-resolution Kratos art. There are no bonus sound effects though, which isn't necessarily bad.

▶ Super Stardust HD

An unusual pick, but we've always secretly dreamed of drifting past asteroids (like the Millennium Falcon sans pursuing TIE fighters). This theme almost takes us there. Plus, we like the embossed icons.

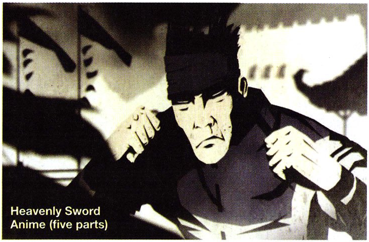
>VIDEOS

Trailers, developer interviews, and other promotional material are usually only interesting until a game's been released. After a few months, we all tend to move on. But we dug through the PlayStation Store and uncovered a few video gems that hold up long after you've defeated that final boss.

TOP PICK

Heavenly Sword Anime (five parts)

Technically, there's a story here: Each of these approximately two-minute-long segments tells the tale of the heavenly sword's origin and history. But really, we recommend this anime for it's artistic style. Download the HD version if your TV supports it.



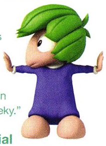
Heavenly Sword Anime (five parts)

OTHER PICKS

▶ Battlefield: Bad Company – Haggard's Blog

Private Haggard, in his flawed yet personable manner, records a video blog to send home—a humorous sub-two minute commentary on war.

▶ Lemmings videos



We can't resist these short, overly cute clips about the, er, slightly spacey Lemmings. Don't miss "Main Intro" and "Cheeky."

▶ PS3 Tutorial videos

Okay, most of you can skip over these. But if you're new to the PS3, these videos sure beat reading through the manual!

Add-ons

These downloads are technically "free," but they're useless unless you've already paid for the associated hardware/software. Still, we thought you should know about them.

Folklore PSU Contest Add-On (Quasarilli)
This free "Folk" was created by Lisa K. as part of a PlayStation Underground contest.

Chinese New Year Skin (MotorStorm)
Spice up your Wulff Revo Rally Car in *MotorStorm* with this free paint job.

Tiger Woods 08: Turnberry
Duff your way through one of Europe's finest golf courses.

Dropkick Murphys Track Pack (Guitar Hero III)
Three songs from Dropkick Murphys. Don't forget to pick up the Christmas single "We Three Kings" by Steve Ouimette while you're there.

EyeCreate (PlayStation Eye)
Video capturing and editing software for the PlayStation Eye.

PS3 101: Making Connections

"Internet?" you ask. "Whazzat?"

All right, so maybe you're not quite that bad. But if you need a tutorial to get your PlayStation 3 hooked up to PlayStation Network, forgive us if we can't help mocking you a bit. (Don't worry; we'll still help you.)

Now, whip out those pens and notepads (or PS3s and Ethernet cables). Today's lecture is on PS3 Internet connectivity.

THE FIRST STEP to accessing the PSN is to connect your PS3 to the Internet. Go to Settings, then Network Settings, and then Internet Connection Settings. Follow the instructions there to set up your Internet connection. (Easy, right? You could've done that on your own...you were just being lazy, weren't you?)

NEXT, GO TO the PlayStation Network menu icon and choose Sign Up. Follow the instructions there, entering an email address, username, birthday, etc., as they're asked. Congratulations! You should be able to access the PlayStation Store and download all the free goodies on this page. But honestly, if you couldn't figure all that out on your own, then you probably couldn't understand these instructions anyway. We'll write slower.

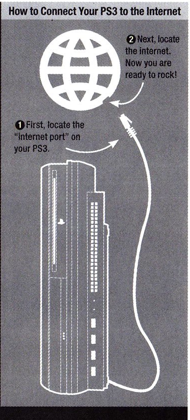
More questions?!?

Q. Uh...can I get online with dial-up?
A. Nope. Sorry. You're out of luck there. Broadband only.

Q. Sniffle.
A. Well, you do have some options. The obvious one is to get broadband. If you need help convincing those you live with to get it for you, we suggest researching rates, waiting for good introductory deals, and generally proving to those who hold the wallet strings that you deserve it. Another option is to make friends with people who have high-speed Internet and then work out a PS3-access-in-exchange-for-Internet-access deal. Or, you could try stealing wireless from a neighbor, but if you couldn't get online through legal methods, than a life of online thievery probably isn't for you.

Q. I did everything right! Why do I keep getting errors?
A. The most common solution for any PS3 connection error is to reset your router. No, not restart it (which means unplugging the power cord), but reset it. That means finding a pin or a toothpick, locating the tiny, sunken-in reset button on your router, and holding it down until the power lights blink. You'll have to set up your passwords for the router again, but if it helps you connect your PS3 to the Internet, it's worth it. You could also try turning off all your firewalls, but that probably wouldn't be worth it. Can you say virus slumber party?

How to Connect Your PS3 to the Internet


❷ Next, locate the internet. Now you are ready to rock!
❶ First, locate the "internet port" on your PS3.

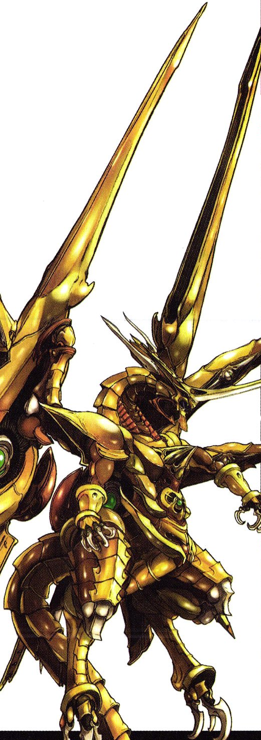
Want more free stuff? Download "Battle for Asylia". We weren't too fond of *Lair* as a game, but this sweeping orchestral score from the soundtrack is a must-get!

NETWORK STRATEGY

CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII

GET EVERY SUMMON

Looking for Cactuar? Need a leg up from Bahamut? We've scoured every corner of *Crisis Core* and put together the ultimate guide to finding every summon.



Name: Ifrit
Skill: Hellfire

After you've encountered Ifrit in the story campaign, you can fight him again in a mission (Zack, the Materia Hunter > Starting Out > Rematch with Ifrit). Defeat him to obtain the Ifrit summon. You can get Ifrit early in the game, so no need to delay.

Hints: If you have flame-absorbent or flame-resistant armor, don't forget to wear it! The Blizzard spell isn't as useful as it sounds: Ifrit moves too quickly for the spell to hit him. Instead, focus on striking him with your sword when his back is toward you (such as after a Flame Shot).

Name: Bahamut
Skill: Mega Flare

Like Ifrit, you can only obtain Bahamut after you've fought him in the story campaign. Access the fight in the mission menu at Zack, the Materia Hunter > Starting Out > Rematch with Bahamut.

Hints: Bahamut has a nasty habit of jumping to islands that you can't reach, so bring a ranged magic attack. Be ready to dodge his Laser Orbs and Lightning attacks. His Mega Flare will deplete your AP and MP to zero, so bring potions or you won't be able to dodge, block or use spells.

Name: Bahamut Fury
Skill: Exa Flare

Defeat Bahamut Fury in the mission: Zack, the Materia Hunter > Anonymous Hints > Treasure Info 6.

Hints: Careful! Bahamut Fury is immensely more powerful than his non-Fury predecessor. Dodge Cluster Sphere by backing up and weaving between the bullets. Use MBarrier to decrease the amount of damage caused by Exa Flare. Also, make sure you have Drain equipped, so you can still attack him even when he's using Judgment of Light.

Name: Odin
Skill: Zantetsuken

To obtain Odin, clear the mission: Zack, the Materia Hunter > Starting Out > Mystery Materia.

Hints: You don't actually have to fight Odin to get his materia. Instead, you fight a weird white creature called a Hungry. (Don't ask us why—all we can do is scratch our heads.) Odin's Zantetsuken kills enemies in a single hit.

Name: Phoenix
Skill: Rebirth Flame

In Nibelheim, talk to the little boy near the inn to start the "Seven Wonders" sub-event. Examine the water tower in the center of the village to get Phoenix.

Hints: Rebirth Flame casts Phoenix Down on Zack. In a similar vein, a cheap way to get through a lot of the missions is to do them on the first floor of the Shinra building, talking to the "promotional potion" lady in between them to heal and gain a Phoenix Down.

Name: Chocobo
Skill: Chocobo Stomp

Search the treasure chests in the mission: Zack, the Materia Hunter > From a Hot Treasure Hunter > Suspicious Mail 1.

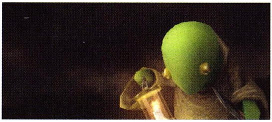
Hints: If the "hot treasure hunter" did her own grunt work, maybe she'd find her "insider tips" a lot more rewarding. But since she's lazy, we get the benefits!

1000 Needles Lv. 3

Name: Cactuar
Skill: 1000 Needles

Locate Cactuar in the mission: Genesis's Forces > Genesis's Forces on the March > Eliminate the copies. Defeat him. Then you'll unlock the Mysteries of the World > Cactoid Secrets quest line, the end of which nets you the Cactuar summon.

Hints: Tackle the Cactuar fights quickly, since the little green critter has the tendency to run away!



Name: Tonberry
Skill: Murderous Thrust

First, fight Tonberry in the mission Seeking Precious Items > Looking for Items > Buried in the Caverns. You'll unlock the Mysteries of the World > Tonberry Quests chain.

Hints: Compared to most of the other creatures, Tonberries are rich little rascals. If you're strapped for cash, you can farm the decoy Tonberries in the Tonberry Quests missions.

Name: Cait Sith
Skill: Courage Boost!

Notes: Find this pesky, traitorous (okay, that's our bias talking there) summon in the mission: Zack, the Materia Hunter > From a Hot Treasure Hunter > Suspicious Mail 3. It's hiding in one of the chests.

Hints: Cait Sith's skill, "Courage Boost," buffs Zack with Endurance, Barrier, Magic Marrier, 0 MP Consumption, 0 AP Consumption, Physical Guard, and Magical Guard. Whew, that's a mouthful.

Name: Moogle
Skill: Moogle Power

Find the adorable Moogle DMW in the mission: Zack, the Materia Hunter > From a Hot Treasure Hunter > Suspicious Mail 4. It's in a treasure chest.

Hints: When summoned, the Moogle will cast "Moogle Power," which levels up all of your equipped materia. Speaking of materia, open all the chests while you're hunting down all the summons—you'll find the materia and items useful when you get into Materia Fusion.

Name: Magic Pot
Skill: Item Mugger

While you're hunting for the Tonberry summon in mission Mysteries of the World > Tonberry Quests > Master Tonberry, you might run into a Magic Pot. Follow its instructions (Jump, Fira, Gravity, Assault Twister…be sure to have those skills equipped) and it'll join your DMW.

Hints: Defeat it a second time and you could obtain a Feather Cap, which lets you "break" your max HP, AP, and MP by three.

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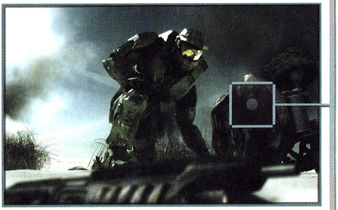
DEMOS

MODS

PATCHES



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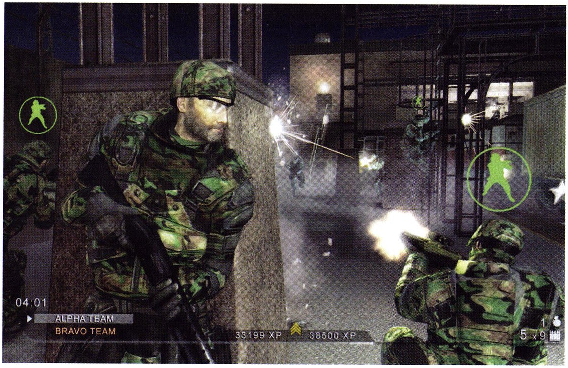
. GAME LINKS . EVOLVED

NETWORK STRATEGY

TOM CLANCY'S
RAINBOW SIX VEGAS 2

Up against some stiff competition? Even out the odds in Team Leader mode with some helpful tips from Steven Masters, game designer for *Vegas 2.*



Pro Tip #1: Shoot the other team. Don't miss.

Objective: In Team Leader mode, you have to get your leader to the extraction point or eliminate the opposing team.

The Twist: As long as your leader is alive, you can respawn. But if the opposing leader kills you, you can't respawn even if your leader is still alive. Leaders can see each other's position.

Tips for the Team

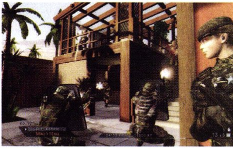
- Keep a small strike squad mobile, clearing ahead of the leader's path. They will be both an early-warning mechanism as well as an effective trap. You know that the enemy will be hunting your leader, so having counter strategies in place will always help.
- Always call out when you find an enemy, preferably identifying the number and position ("two behind the generator!"). Keep your info clear and to the point, and your team will benefit.
- Whenever you're clearing an area, make sure you flush out any possible hiding points; it's a fast way to lose the match if you tell your leader he's clear when there's an enemy still hiding in the corner.
- Look to provide the best support you can to your leader: Stay mobile, follow their lead, and if necessary, be prepared to take a bullet for them.

Tips for the Leader

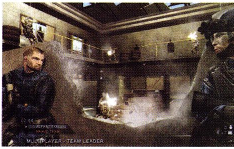
- Communicate the position of the enemy leader. If you notice that your opponent is racing toward the extraction point, you need to let your team know in time to stop him! On the other hand, if your opponent isn't really working their way toward the extract point, they're probably hunting you.
- Camping isn't an effective route to success. The more static you are, the bigger a target you are. It's relatively easy to coordinate a strike against a fixed position. Keep on the move, but always be as cautious as possible. Sprint from cover to cover, assess the territory ahead of you, and always coordinate with teammates.
- A sneaky tactic I enjoy when I'm playing as a leader is to plant some C4 and then fall back to a safer position. You know that the enemy will be hunting you, so you can almost always nab a few kills with a trap like this. Of course, it can backfire badly if you get flanked, so watch out!

ALPHA TEAM
BRAVO TEAM
38500 XP

Pro Tip #2: Stair railings don't provide good cover.



Pro Tip #3: Getting a sandwich in the middle of a fight is frowned upon.



Pro Tip #4: Dying doesn't help you win, so take cover.

MULTIPLAYER - TEAM LEADER

Pro Tip #5: Don't aim your gun at your own teammates.

THIS IS
VEGAS

This Is Vegas made us pine for our favorite desert hotspots. Next time you're in town, check out our picks.

» TRAVELING MAN

PLAY OFFLINE

Our guide to the real Las Vegas

Between the recently released *Rainbow Six Vegas 2* and the upcoming *This Is Vegas*, Nevada's Sin City has never been so popular on the PlayStation. If all that virtual glitter has got you giddy for a first-time trip to the desert paradise, take heed: Vegas can be a wondrous playground *if* you know your way around. Take a gamble with our world-exclusive PTOM tips for the Vegas newbie.

Where to stay

If you really are a Vegas virgin, then treat yourself right: Stay on the Strip. Don't make the amateur mistake of shacking up in a fleabag motel off-Strip just to pinch a few pennies. You'll be trapped alongside the degenerate gamblers and overstuffed families, and you'll miss out on the luxurious vibe of the better hotels. Gary's favorite: **Mandalay Bay**. "It smells like coconut suntan lotion," he keeps blathering. It's also got the best sports book (more on that in a bit). Keep in mind that Mandalay is no bargain—but you *can* get a great rate if you go off-season and/or mid-week (try a Sunday to Wednesday stay for maximum savings). Also, be sure to sign up with all the hotels' sites; soon enough, your inbox will be flooded with deals galore.

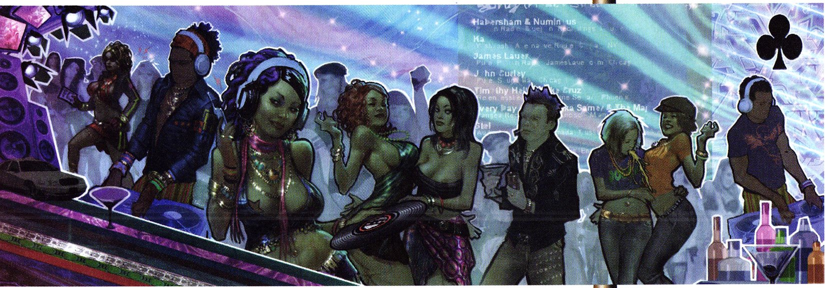
Speaking of deals, avoid any that seem too good to be true; you're no high-roller, so it's unlikely you'll be getting anything that's truly "free." These are almost always timeshare scams. Pay for that steak dinner instead; a free filet isn't enough reason to be trapped in a never-ending sales pitch.

Finally, you might get some unbelievable deals in the dead of summer, but there's a tradeoff: If you actually leave the hotels and head outside, you'll melt.

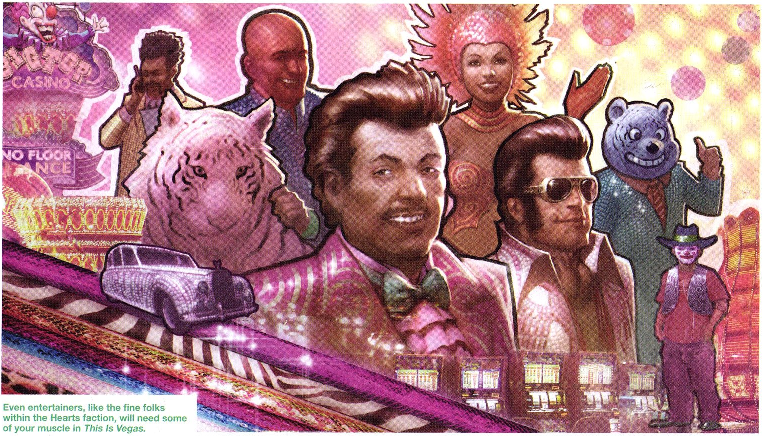
What to do

Rob's top people-watching spot: poolside at the **Hard Rock**. Just

MAYAN
MAYAN
Vegas



You'll have to curry favor with four different groups—each named after a card suit—in *This Is Vegas*. The Clubs enjoy the...clubs.



Even entertainers, like the fine folks within the Hearts faction, will need some of your muscle in *This Is Vegas.*

be sure to do a few extra sit-ups before you mosey out in your trunks. There's some real talent at the Hard Rock, but they tend to have appropriately hard bodies.

Anther pick from the bossman: the **Bellagio** buffet. This isn't your run-of-the-mill $1.99 grub hub. You'll feast on some of the finest cuisine from a range of hot and cold stations, including some succulent seafood. It ain't cheap, and the line can be long to get in—especially on the weekends when they offer their champagne brunch. But it's worth the wait.

Our favorite place to window shop has got to be the Forum Shops at **Caesars Palace**. For a bit of romance, try a gondola ride in the **Venetian**—but consider yourself warned: All Vegas hotels are designed to make it difficult to leave (the longer you're there, the more you might gamble), but the Venetian might be the toughest one to find a way out!

You can also catch a show, but ever since Celine Dion wrapped up her Vegas extravaganza, we're too heartbroken to consider ponying up a C-note for a few hours of singing, prancing, and all that other twee stuff you'll get from Cirque de Soleil and its ilk. Instead, we'd rather save our dough and enjoy the free stuff, like a stroll through the indoor gardens at the Bellagio or a drool-inducing ogle session at the Ferrari store in the **Wynn** hotel.

What to play

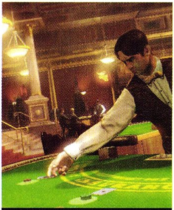
Not a gambler? No worries. You can always play a few slots…or, on second thought, perhaps not—it's a sucker's game, through and through. That said, if you do find a **nickel-slot machine** that amuses you, drop a Jackson in and think of it like a classic coin-op as it devours your cash in record time. Hey, you might get lucky...or you might even get a free cocktail.

A better bet: **video poker**. With some very simple strategy, you can basically break even for hours on end. Meanwhile, you'll get fed an endless amount of free alcohol (don't forget to tip the waitress!).

Wanna try your hand at a table game? Blackjack may be the best option, but be sure you know how to really play. Or, try **Let It Ride**, an easy-to-learn variation on poker that can be a blast if you're sitting alongside gamblers who don't mind showing their cards—perfectly acceptable in this setting because you're playing against the table and not each other.

If you're a bit more daring, you can try your hand at Teresa's favorite: **roulette**. It's a real adrenaline rush and often draws a big crowd, but you'll need to be disciplined if you're on a budget. Teresa's tip: Avoid the numbers. Instead, just bet on the colors—red or black. "To really extend your time and increase the likelihood of free drinks—honestly, a rum and coke can cost 12 bucks from the bars! Why pay when you can get them for free?—don't bet in every game," she says. "Just wait until you see a lot of blacks or reds in a row, and then keep betting on the opposite color until you win." (Disclaimer: This works for Teresa. It probably won't work for you.)

Still too squeamish to blow your dough on the gaming floor? Visit the sport book at the Mandalay, pick a game you like, toss down a modest bet, then sit back and enjoy the game. One caveat: You have to bet some real cash to get free drinks in this setting, so the money you save in gambling will likely go straight to the bar tab!



The house always wins

Need a break from all that criminal activity in *This Is Vegas*? Saunter into a casino for some perfectly legal gambling. Midway's upcoming release includes at least three types of gambling mini-games: slots, poker, and blackjack. Just don't play this to bone up your real-life table skills. The fun here is cheating—something we don't recommend you try in the real Vegas. In blackjack, for example, when you put on your shades, you'll see markings that roughly equate to a card-counting system. Just like in real life, if you cheat for too long or make it too obvious, you risk a boot to the butt, or worse—the butt of a pistol to the back of your head.

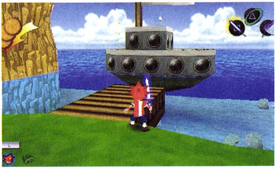
PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for the price of about three gallons of bio-deisel. We say Yea or Nay.

+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

− **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.

You'll be able to capture them with the "Time Net."



Ape Escape: On the Loose

PRICE: $13.99 **DEVELOPER:** SCEA

− We've said it before, we'll say it again: Everyone loves monkeys. And those non-titular simians of *Ape Escape* (they're monkeys, dammit!) are especially adorable, with their silly antics and their matching mind-enhancing helmets. The game was an instant classic on the PSone thanks to its ground-breaking control scheme—it was the first title to require the use of dual-analog control, and it worked brilliantly. Couple the innovative control with an impressive array of nifty gadgets—each with its own unique dual-analog input—toss in some great level design, and you had a real charmer. Unfortunately, this PSP version remaps the control scheme to miserable effect. It just doesn't work very well without a DualShock in your hands. We can't recommend this for your PSP, but if *Ape Escape* gets a third life as a PS3 playable, we'd quit monkeying around and download it in an instant.

Rocketmen: Axis of Evil

PRICE: $9.99

DEVELOPER: A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. GAMES

− **POP QUIZ: What's the bigger threat?** Clumps of identical enemies that bombard you with lasers a thousand times each level or a haphazard camera that relentlessly pushes ahead regardless of whether you're ready? Answer: both! Together, they conspire to make *Rocketmen: Axis of Evil*—which should have been a pleasant top-down shooter—into a test of patience. Sure, we enjoy totin' cartoony sci-fi weapons, but when we can't accomplish our secondary objectives simply because the camera pans away before we had a chance to explore...well, that just takes the fun right out of the game.

PLAYSTATION STORE

Our favorite downloads from the (PC) PlayStation Store this month:

▶ CRISIS CORE THEME (PSP)
Is there any better way to layer on the fanboyism than to grace your PSP with the official *Crisis Core* theme while simultaneously playing the game? Grab it from the PC PlayStation Store (not the PS3 one) at http://store.playstation.com and let your inner *FF* geekiness shine.

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WWW.MODSHOP.NET

Letters Feedback, Insight, Critical Judgment, and Some Crazy #%@*!

"It saddens me in a way to see the PS2 on its last legs. It was a great generation for gaming" >>

RAPID FIRE

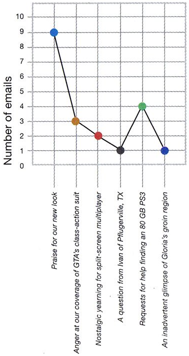
Do you think any *Halo* games might be coming to PS3?
Heath Pieczynski, via email
No.

Do you think some videogames should tone down the violence?
Rahim, via email
Perhaps.

On the first page of reviews, why do some of the editors have bags over their heads?
Paul Tuttle, Houston, TX
Because they were naughty.

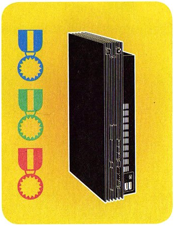
Which next-gen console do you guys think is better?
Darren Fan, via email
PS3. Duh.

What's on your mind:



THE GREATEST GENERATION

I am a gamer through and through since I first picked up an Atari joystick, but I also live in the real world. I have bills and a budget, and spending $60 for a game typically isn't an option. I do understand that the cost of developing a game for the new generation has skyrocketed, but that still doesn't justify a purchase for me. I'm not into the online gaming community, let alone paying for parts of it. I enjoy solo experiences in games. I'm not into flashy graphics and realistic physics; they might be amazing to behold and offer a new experience, but that doesn't make or break a game for me.



That's why it saddens me in a way to see the PS2 on its last legs. It was a great generation for gaming, and it offered an expansive and wonderful library. While sales numbers of the PS2 bested even the new generation during the last holiday season and partly into the new year (which was a huge surprise to all of us, I'm assuming), the software releases began to dwindle and so did the shelf space at the local game and electronic stores as they make room for the new generation. It happens with every new generation of console that comes out and it's to be expected. Some last-gen library support can be dropped completely as we've seen historically with other systems—but at least Sony still continues to support the PS2!

But there is some good news for me. With stores continuing to make room for the PS3's expanding library, they have to move the PS2's software as quickly as possible, which comes in the form of regular markdowns. This is a win for any budget gamer out there. Games that I previously wanted to try but I felt didn't warrant the purchase price have now been marked down to $20 or less—even RPGs, my favorite genre. And that's the price for new, not used! And with the continued support of Sony, some games that probably never would have made it out of Japan are now given a legitimate shot. As collections *(MGS!* the better ver-

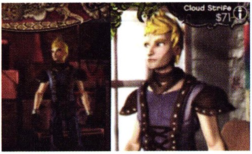
LETTER OF THE MONTH

Rock on!

In the PSN Games review for April '08, you guys asked to hear our band names and band members, so I thought I'd send mine in for laughs.

Band: Crisis from the Sky
Andi Kirk, via email

Brilliant. Teresa is already saving her allowance to buy tickets for the band's world tour. Gary's been practicing his drumming, getting ready to audition to replace Aeris. ("She's gonna die sooner or later, I just know it! And I'll be ready...") And Rob is, well...horrified. Well done. Anyone else have a band that can top the majestic grandeur of Crisis from the Sky? Hurry up and send it in!



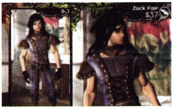
Vocals: Cloud Strife—short, attention-seeking emo kid makes an ideal lead...

Aeris Gainsboro
$158

Drums: Aeris Gainsboro (because her entire name wouldn't fit!)—just because I couldn't picture anyone else drumming!

Sephiroth
$1

Guitar: Sephiroth—dark, imposing, superior, hates the lead singer.



Bass: Zack Fair—the "nice guy" who holds everything together.

RANDOM RHETORICAL QUESTION FROM A READER EMAIL WE WON'T BE RUNNING

"Who doesn't like hitting their friend on the head after they just killed you?"

sions anyway) and retro games (which I love) continue to release, the PS2 makes its last gasps and grasps for your dollar. I'm still enjoying the last generation—and previous generations for that matter—and I will continue to enjoy it to its fullest. But the question is, are there others out there just like me, or am I just being stubborn and jaded? I'll probably be blasted by some for being cheap or dismissed as not being a "true" gamer, which is fine. I just want to see what other gamers think, if there really are more people out there like me, but most importantly generate a discussion.

Chris Martinez, via email

You're not alone, Chris. As you pointed out yourself, the PS2 continues to thrive, besting even next-gen consoles in sales. Granted, many of the buyers are casual gamers, whereas a good portion of serious gamers has moved on to the PS3. But with such a vast library of software and an unimaginably massive installed base, the PS2 isn't going anywhere anytime soon. We also agree that some of the best software for hardcore gamers comes out toward the sunset of a system's lifecycle. Heck, just about any new release from NIS America is reason enough to dust off your PS2! We do have one suggestion, even for a penny-pincher like you: Have you thought about a PSP? Plenty of affordable RPGs, the ability to download and play PSone titles...seems like your kind of thing.

SLIM PICKIN'S

Let me start off by saying I've been a very loyal PlayStation gamer. PSone was my first console and I'm waiting for *MGS4* to get my PS3.

But anyway, I bought a PSP when it just came out, confident that my money was going to a good cause, and boy was I right—the PSP changed the way I played mobile games. Gameboy and the DS were left in the wake of awesomeness after I played my PSP.

When the PSP Slim came out, I didn't panic; I was comfortable with my "old" bulky PSP. But then I found out that the Slim has new components and whirligigs that make it able to use Skype. I've been using Skype to talk to friends and I think it's awesome, so now I'm willing to trade in my PSP and some games to purchase a slim PSP.

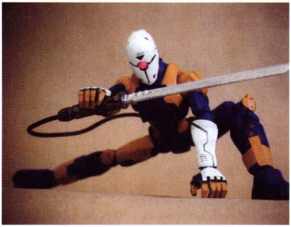
The point in this is that I'm kind of disappointed that I have to throw down some more money to be able to harness the full power of the PSP, but it will be money well spent. Do you guys feel the same?

Harrison Silverstein, via email

Quick fact: Nintendo has released, literally, 678,962 iterations of the Gameboy. So do we feel disappointed about one measly upgrade to the PSP. Not at all! Plus, you get TONS of additional value for your money—check out our opening story in this month's Update for all the details. Now, if you haven't already traded in your fat model, may we introduce you to our new best friend Chris Martinez? Chris is too, er, frugal to buy a handheld, so how about a little charity, one gamer to another?

Art in Action

Why play as Kratos when you can play with him? Gerald Javier gives *God of War's* leading man a fitting tribute. Check out Gerald's other creations at www.GeejaysCustoms.com.



You can't keep a good ninja down—*Metal Gear's* Gray Fox is reborn once again thanks to the handiwork of Oxnard, CA's, Michael Amos.

contact

Send your thoughts and comments about the magazine to letters@psmonline.com. We'll probably just read the complimentary ones, but hey, miracles happen.

POP QUIZ

Number 2 pencils ready? OK, begin.

1. When was strafing introduced in the *Ratchet & Clank*-series?
a) *Ratchet & Clank (2002)*
b) *Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando (2003)*
c) *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal (2004)*
d) *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters (2007)*

2. Lombax : Ratchet :: _______ : Daxter

3. Who is the PS2-exclusive guest character in *Soulcalibur II?*
a) Spawn
b) Link
c) Greedo
d) Heihachi

4. Which game did *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima not work on?
a) *Snatcher*
b) *Policenauts*
c) *Lunar: Eternal Blue*
d) *Penguin Adventure*

5. List the following mascots/monsters in order of their first appearances in a *Final Fantasy* game:
a) Cactuar
b) Chocobo
c) Moogle
d) Tonberry

6. The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences chose Sid Meier *(Civilization)* as the second person to be inducted into its hall of fame. Who was the first?
a) Shigeru Miyamoto
b) Ken Kutaragi
c) Hironobu Sakaguchi
d) Will Wright

7. Which of the following did Rockstar release first on the PS2?
a) *Grand Theft Auto III*
b) *Max Payne*
c) *Oni*
d) *Smuggler's Run*

8. Which has more buttons: the PSP or a DualShock 3 controller? (No peeking!)
a) PSP
b) DualShock 3
c) Equal number of buttons

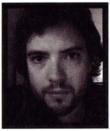
9. What film contains *Gran Turismo* producer Kazunori Yamauchi's favorite car chase?
a) *The French Connection*
b) *Gone in 60 Seconds*
c) *The Blues Brothers*
d) *Ronin*

10. What international soccer star compared watching Cristiano Ronaldo's skills to playing the PlayStation?
a) Zinedine Zidane
b) David Beckham
c) Emanual Adebayor

Answers:
1) b; 2) Ottsel; 3) d; 4) c; 5) b, c, d, a; 6) a; 7) d; 8) c; 9) d; 10) c

PlayStation POV

The PS2 is still The King of Fun



WHY IS THERE A GUY WITH A BEARD IN THE spot where the guys from Sony usually are? Well…it may have something to with the fact that in a former life, believe it or not, I was the editor-in-chief of this magazine's predecessor, the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.* This really was back in the "old days." Big name franchises had numbers lower than a four in the title, the Final Fantasies were still in single-digits, musical instrument games were commercially disastrous, and the PlayStation was the unassailable king of the gaming world. My partner in crime? This magazine's executive editor, Gary Steinman. What goes around, as they say, comes around.

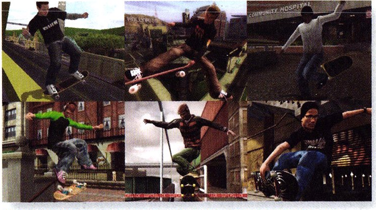
On that note, I thought it might be cute to revisit some of the notions of this bygone age, and ponder a question that comes up year, after year, after year regardless of which "generation" we're in. Are videogames truly "mainstream" yet? Back when the PlayStation 2 was hitting its stride in 2001, this idea was unquestionably the one thing that developers, marketers, and ultimately gamers were *obsessed* with. The original PlayStation was nudging past the 100 million units sold mark, and the PS2 was charging up on that number even faster. There was a thought that big-name gaming brands would ultimately conquer all, but then something happened that messed it all up.

Somewhere along the way, everyone forgot what being "mainstream" really meant. Instead of focusing on broadening the appeal of games, we saw endless iterations and imitations of franchises. The idea of being "huge" replaced the idea of being "mainstream." Once a game had broken one million, or two million, or in some cases *ten million* units, there was a rush to replicate the recipe. We got endless, boring, creatively barren versions of *Tony Hawk* and *Grand Theft Auto,* all of which were focused on *gamers'* tastes exclusively. Rather than expand the market, and establish gaming as the big boss of entertainment, this stuff did nothing but stunt its growth.

Being truly "mainstream" is not *really* about chasing big numbers. Sure, if the idea is working the numbers will come—but if we've learned anything from the transition to PlayStation 3, it's that you don't appeal to everyone with games like *WarHawk* or *Uncharted* or *MotorStorm.* They're certainly great games, and hardcore PlayStation fans are enjoying all three (me included,) but mainstream, mass-market, sell-it-by-the-squillions success comes from something *else*.

Ironically, the most powerful object in the PlayStation arsenal is *still* the PlayStation 2. While it doesn't offer the glitz or the glamour of the PlayStation 3, we're seeing games designed for it now that bring the perfect mix of accessibility, mainstream appeal, and (very importantly) reasonable price. While Nintendo's Wii is getting all the mainstream love, the little old PS2 is still spectacularly significant. Far from being the system on its way out…it's still selling strongly, and the latest batch of games are bang on target. As a hardcore gamer, you may look down your nose at *Buzz!* or *SingStar,* but they're at least as significant, if not more so than the mainstream's acceptance of games like *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band.* Everyone understands what they're about, they're simple to understand, and ultimately they're focused *entirely* on what we all started playing games in the first place for: FUN.

John Davison is the co-founder of whattheyplay.com, an online parents guide to videogames.



When franchises are milked to death with iteration after iteration, Davison claims it doesn't help the industry's image…though it does make lots of cash.

> "Somewhere along the way, everyone forgot what being 'mainstream' really meant. Instead of focusing on broadening the appeal of games, we saw endless iterations and imitations of franchises."

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You're tox - ic
I'm slip - pin' un - der
TIME
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It's games like *Buzz!* and *SingStar* that Davison believes will push games into mainstream relevancy.

Next month

In PlayStation: The Official Magazine

Think of the most anticipated PlayStation 3 game this year (now that ***GTA IV*** is out). We've got the comprehensive review that brings you every detail on the game that *every* PS3 owner will want.

Plus, behind the scenes coverage of the latest ***Silent Hill*** and ***Little Big Planet.***

And are you ready for some football? EA Sports prepares a special anniversary edition of ***Madden.***

With all this gaming goodness set to arrive, it *will* really seem like Christmas in July.

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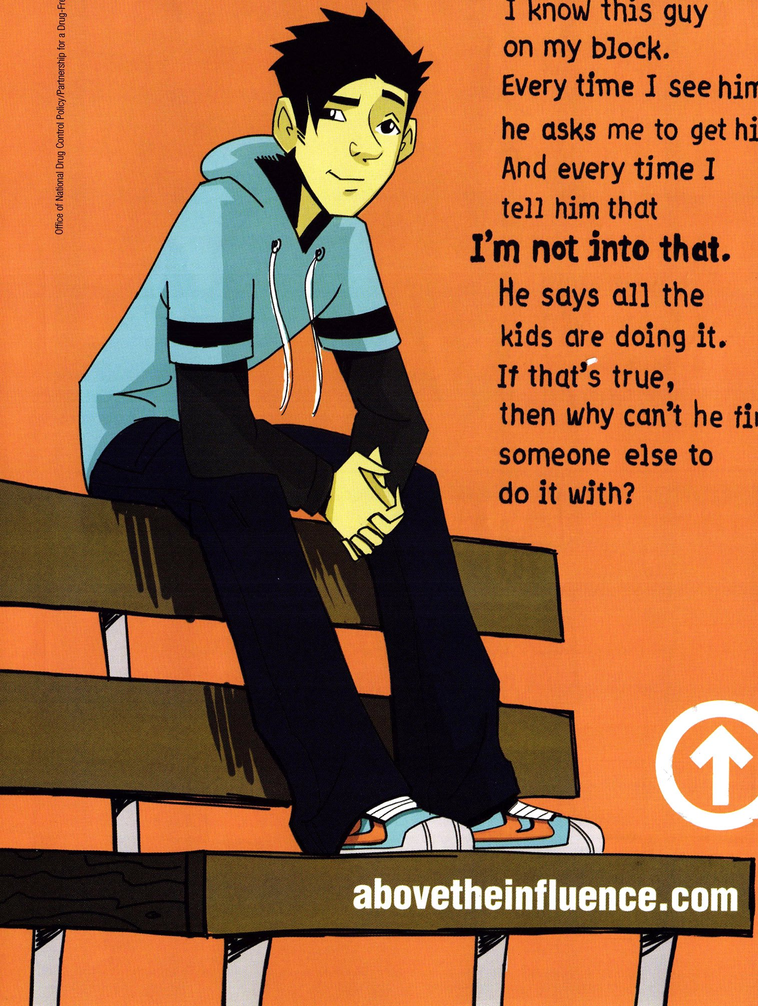
I know this guy
on my block.
Every time I see him
he asks me to get high.
And every time I
tell him that
I'm not into that.
He says all the
kids are doing it.
If that's true,
then why can't he find
someone else to
do it with?



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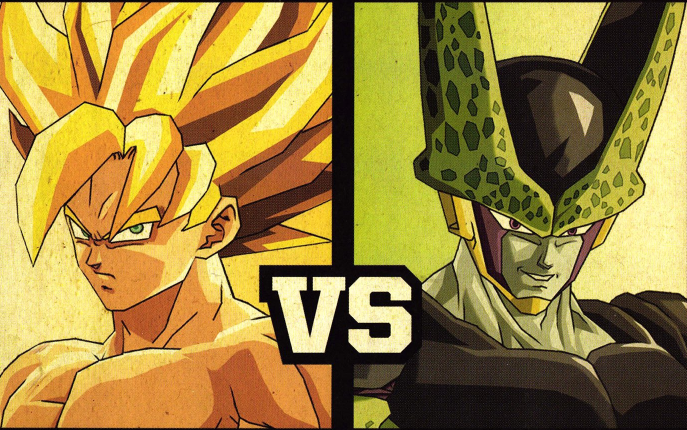
KAMEHAMEHA!



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